

The History Project



A series of oral history interviews conducted with notable citizens of the Republic of Talossa

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The History Project: In Their Own Words

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J K Kelley, 6 March 2005

Interviewer: Chris Gruber

The genius of the Kingdom is characterized by petulance, control freakism, manipulation and when necessary, outright intimidation. The genius of the Republic is welcome and participation.

Q: *Let's start with a standard question: what attracted you to Talossa in the first place, about six years ago?*

A: Honestly, the first thing was the main Kingdom webpage. I loved the tongue-in-cheek nature of it. The picture of Taco Bell as ethnic cuisine had me howling.

Q: *So you figured Talossa is pretty much an entertaining lark?*

A: I didn't really know. But I developed a perception at the time.

Q: *How quickly did that perception change? And what changed it?*

A: About three posts into my first Wittenberg foray. To really answer that, I'll have to explain the first perception.

Q: *Go ahead.*

A: Well, I saw the picture of young Ben in the Romanian train conductor's hat, and I seemed to see a true iconclast, an independent spirit--yet one who had the strength to forge something funny and fun that had grown and prospered. It impressed the hell out of me. And I felt that Ben Madison and I would be kindred spirits. The Ben I saw on Witt was not the Ben I had gleaned from www.execpc.com/~talossa.

Q: *You saw someone who was in it for the fun as much as anything?*

A: Originally, yes. Someone strong enough in his position to share control of his creation with others with good humour, much liked as a result. A Beneficent monarch.

Q: *And, as you said, within three posts on Wittenberg, you were put off that initial impression?*

A: Or thereabouts. The first thing I noticed was that Ben's default setting was attack mode. He was already in that mode regarding TLP [the Talossan Liberal Party]. Very quickly he was in it regarding me, simply because I mentioned that I was a Hellenic pagan. I didn't quantify that for him much, and he quickly sketched a literary caricature of it and mocked it. At that time his admitted bigotries were pagans and Australians. Good thing I wasn't Australian.

Q: (Laughs.) *Indeed. Did you formulate any idea why he was acting that way? Being so... hostile and antagonistic?*

A: Well, at this point I still believed most of *Ár Páts*. And to go by that, Ben had faced a long list of resolute haters trying to tear him down. That was credible enough; that has happened to many visionaries. so I thought, well, he's developed a quick trigger finger. But I also began to realize he was just plain rude. And that he was Bending my words, twisting past posts. I never saw anyone who could morph the recent past so quickly and negatively in my life. It was Goebbelsian.

Q: *Goebbelsian? So there was a Nazi flavour from the get-go? (Laughs.)*

A: I wouldn't say Nazi. I'm thinking mainly of the propaganda factor. The most twisted example of effective propaganda that comes to my mind just happens to be that of Goebbels.

Q: *Were these attacks offensive to you in a personal manner, or did they simply turn you off Talossa?*

A: Both. It didn't take me long to decide I didn't want to hang around. Ben had the silent acquiescence of almost everyone on Witt. I decided it was a place full of people with no balls.

Q: *And yet you still hung around the outskirts, watching us from afar?*

A: No, there was a second spasm. Danihél Roðgarüt wrote to me, a very kind e-mail, asking that I reconsider. He wasn't rough on Ben except to say what I already knew: that Ben sometimes went off on people. so I decided to come back. I saw that I had the support of the second largest party, which helped. I posted again, said I was through talking about my religion, and was still interested.

Q: *And what happened?*

A: Oh, man. He was pissed. He swore to keep me out, and began a campaign of morphing verbal abuse and ridicule.

Q: *So at that point, it wasn't simply mocking and indulging in admitted biases; he outright wanted to hurt you?*

A: There was no question. He tried many angles, and he was creative. He's always been good with words. He even went so far as to hint that if I went away for a year, maybe he'd reconsider. I noticed a tone of desperation creeping into his phrasing.

Q: *So there was sort of "push-and-pull" tone underlying his weird attacks?*

A: Not sure I'd say it quite that way, but I would put it this way: I could see him straining. Behind the scenes it was clear he was buttonholing everyone, politicking, probably libeling and slandering, and otherwise making sure everyone knew that to support me in any way would bring Royal Disappointment. I'm pretty sure he even had a spy in the TLP mailing counsels.

Q: *A spy, huh?*

A: Yeah, I have good reason to think so.

Q: *Any evidence, or is this not the time or place?*

A: It is most definitely the time and place. It was like this: there was a mailing group composed of TLP members plus a few sympathetic sorts, or those perceived to be. One of these individuals had written to me to interview me about my citizenship bid. I answered all his questions candidly and reasonably. Yet there was one detail I never said on Witt that Ben somehow got. He could only have gotten it from a few people. And that was that I had been persuaded to return by TLP members. I just said I'd been persuaded. I didn't say publicly by whom. Only someone in those counsels would have known.

Q: *Did you formulate any theories about Madison's true motivations or did you simply write him off?*

A: Something Ben said about me became somewhat true. He was saying that if I was let in, I would cause trouble. Originally that was false, but I'll say honestly that it no longer was. If I got in, I was going to join TLP and pay his sorry ass back. (Pause.) Sorry, that really didn't address your question.

Q: *Not a problem. When the TLP bolted from the Talossan political scene with their infamous boycott of the legislature, what did you think?*

A: I wasn't surprised. A man can only stand in an ever-deepening vat of piss before it gets above his head. I figured that now that Ben had absolutely no meaningful opposition, he would need a new enemy. I didn't see how he could hold out any length of time without an [Emmanuel Goldstein](#).

Q: *So you were watching Talossa even after your departure?*

A: I never stopped.

Q: *What was so appealing about Talossa that you decided to take a seat in the audience? Most people who were in your shoes left it behind altogether, but you chose to keep up with the RT. Why?*

A: Several reasons. For one thing, I wanted to make sure to collect whatever evidence I needed in case the libel went too far. also, I was rooting for his downfall. I have never pretended not to be vengeful. I figured things might change, and they might be fun to watch.

Q: *You're a historian, right?*

A: I have a bachelor's degree in it.

Q: *So you're used to taking a detached, objective position when it comes to watching something like this unfold, I imagine.*

A: It's sort of like a hat I can put on.

Q: *Were there any Talossan personalities that stood out in this rich pageant? Or was it simply Ben's World and We Were Just Living in It?*

A: A number of personalities stood out, but except for TLP most of them seemed to be merely Ben's compliant extensions. Art verbotten was a notable exception. That changed later, of course, but I

think you're asking about the Greek God Guy days.

Q: *No, I mean during your Period of Exile, as it were. You were in a position to observe people and things, rather than be a passionate part of the proceedings.*

A: Oh. Sorry. Well, during my Exile, up to a point nearly everyone but TLP seemed to toe the Ben line. Then came the breakup of the PC. I think that's the defining moment where people's Talossan existence began to exist independent of Ben.

Q: *Were you cheering from the sidelines?*

A: And how!

Q: *So when the breakup of the PC led to more and more heated confrontations in the Talossan public forum, did you see any particular conclusion coming from all of this?*

A: I didn't foresee the founding of the Republic. I did expect a wave of renunciations. I underestimated the staying power of the Talossan concept.

Q: *What events prior to 1 June 2004 stand out in your mind as especially powerful in this little drama?*

A: the big one, really, was the feud between you and Ben. The short answer there is that Ben's tactics and persistence against you turned off a lot of his former supporters. When he was caught digging for dirt on you, he looked horseshit. I think at that point, the Michael Popes and Gödafriëu Válcadác'hs of Talossa began to ask themselves: "Wait a minute. [Ián Anglatzarâ] never did me any wrong. Maybe he wasn't so bad. I know Chris; he's made mistakes, but he's not evil incarnate. He has a knighthood for God's sake. Maybe the problem is the King."

Q: *Did you see this conflict in any historical context? Or was it simply a little community?*

A: The [tea definitely went into the harbour](#) when Ben put Max[ime Paquin-Charbonneau] in as PM. You guys weren't going to stand by for that.

Q: *And when Wittenberg was taken over on 1 June, what was your immediate reaction?*

A: I believe I opened a bottle of single-malt, poured myself a shot, and toasted the Republic of Talossa.

Q: *No shock, no surprise, no gasps of awe?*

A: I had seen hints. but I hadn't expected the timing, nor the large number of founders. It was more than I'd ever expected. less surprise than jubilation. And since Ben was out of the country, it was even funnier.

Q: *And in the days immediately following that one, what happened?*

A: I watched with more interest than I had even while you and Ben were slugging it out. I wanted to

see what your Republic would really be. Not for nothing had I refrained from burning bridges.

Q: *I assume you were hoping for us to not drop the ball once we had possession, so to speak. Did we deliver on your hope?*

A: Beyond my hope. You had energy, principles and had quickly set up an efficient means of government. The Talossan diaspora, a term I'm kind of proud to have coined, began to come in.

Q: *How quickly after the Seizure of Witt did you begin to start the process of returning?*

A: I think it was when I saw the reception Miestrâ Schivâ got. It seemed like the door might be open for me. As you may recall, when I was originally voted down, I didn't fire a parting blast. I said nothing. I didn't beg, nor did I alienate anyone. I just left with dignity and sat in the stands. So there was no direct reason to think anyone in the Republic hated my guts.

Q: *Your reception into the Kingdom was not just frosty, but downright acidic. Compare that to your reception into the Republic.*

A: Well, in the Kingdom, people were friendly at first, but when Ben became negative, people just stopped talking to me. my entry into the Republic was handled with much greater care. I thought long and hard who to write to.

Q: *And who did you choose? How did it go?*

A: it came down to Michael Pope or Gödafriëu Válcadác'h. And I had the latter's e-mail address. plus, he knew me only as a nutjob, but not personally. All he knew about me was said by Ben. Well, he had stopped viewing everything else through Ben's lens. He seemed like a good guy. At the same time, Gödafriëu's a committed Christian, so this would be a good test. If he had an open mind, despite our differences of faith, the possibilities were good. It went superbly--I couldn't have asked for a kinder reaction. soon I heard from Michael Pope, who was his usual good-hearted self.

Q: *And after that, it was just a matter of diving in to Wittenberg and having a good swim?*

A: I knew I might have some doubters. but I also knew that I needed do nothing but be myself.

Q: *Has your opinion of the Republic or her people changed at all since then?*

A: It's improved. I've come to know several people better. I've jumped to conclusions and had to reconsider them. I'm very grateful to the Republic for a lot, and it hasn't even been around that long. 'Greek god guy' has become my 'nigger.' By adopting it, laughing over it and using it myself in ways, a term used to debase me has become a big joke that we all laugh at. It's very healthy.

Q: *So, you'd say the Republic is a more mature Talossa?*

A: More mature, more democratic, and undominated by a cult of twisted personality. Documented by facts and sense rather than twisted bullshit.

Q: *So, in a way, less fascistic?*

A: Not fascist at all. There are many opportunities for involvement. I've politely declined more than I can recall. Right now, anyone in the Republic who wishes to help shape it can do so in a dozen ways.

Q: *An [open-source](#) society?*

A: That's a pretty good analogy. The Kingdom is [Internet Explorer](#). The Republic is [Mozilla](#).

Q: *Going back to the historical perspective bit, how do you see the great conflict of 2003-2004 in the Kingdom?*

A: Can you give me a defining beginning and ending event here?

Q: *The Hallowe'en Event to the Seizure of Fort Witt.*

A: It was kind of like the Kingdom developed [Parkinson's \[Disease\]](#). It grew increasingly less lucid and coherent, and descended into madness. From a historical perspective, it reminds me somewhat of the long-term downfall of the Roman Empire.

Q: *And the rise of the Republic?*

A: That looks a lot like the American Revolution. Spasms of independence followed by schism.

Q: *But ultimately, no tyranny.*

A: None. If anything, it gets more democratic as that democracy becomes codified. One historical item worth looking at is the roman concept of the 'genius.' The Romans believed that any group had a sort of spirit, which they called its 'genius'. for example, the genius of the tenth legion. The genii of the Republic and Kingdom could not be more different.

Q: *How would you define these respective genii?*

A: The genius of the Kingdom is characterized by petulance, control freakism, manipulation and when necessary, outright intimidation. The genius of the Republic is welcome and participation. I suspect that many in the Kingdom feel as we do, but are unwilling to let go of Ben's friendship. That friendship must exert a mighty gravitational pull, because it held so many of you for so long even when his actions were just plain rectal.

Q: *How great is the test faced by the Republic as the Constitution comes into its final form, in your opinion?*

A: I think the test is whether we can accept a document that can never totally satisfy any one person, but has tried hard to cover as many important issues for as many people as they were willing to throw out for debate. If the PGC [Provisional Governing Council] ratifies it, I would say that we have reached that. for example the preamble. I still don't agree with you about it, but I wouldn't refuse to ratify the document over that, or over some other minor issue. I would only vote contrâ if I felt there were a time bomb in it, and if there is, it's my fault because I'm supposed to spot

and defuse them in my [Constitutional Committee] capacity.

Q: *Where are headed in the immediate future as a nationette? Is our future particularly bright? And how might our pasts come back to haunt us?*

A: That's a lot of questions. In the immediate future, I think we're headed for a truly Republican form of government, which will instigate a new phase of partisan politics. If those politics are handled with civility and respect for the process above all, our future is bright. If we become dicks to each other, voices will grow quiet and interest will dim.

Q: *So, if handled well, nothing but blue skies?*

A: I think we will have crises. I think every nation does. I think how we handle them will define us.

Q: *Forgive me for returning to the history angle, but you're a resource I'm bound and determined to exploit. Are there any historical parallels we should watch for and avoid?*

A: Talossan history, or world history?

Q: *World.*

A: Sclerosis. The late Roman Empire ceased to have anything to do with either the popular interest or the principles the Roman state was founded upon. For a period of years, you got to be emperor when the Praetorian Guard had spent the donative from the last emperor and thought you'd give them another pile of money. We must never allow our government to become sclerotic. Take for example the PC [Progressive Conservatives] in the Regipäts. It held an iron grip. It could count on enough votes for outright majority. There was no point to politics. If the PSD [Talossan Social Democratic Party] gains the same sort of sway, and keeps it for too long, it will become more a habit than a political movement. We must never be governed by a habit.

Q: *Is this an indictment of the PSD? (Laughs.)*

A: not at all. You asked me to look ahead to what might happen, and what we had to watch for. I see the PSD as strong enough that it should watch for this particular phenomenon.

Q: *Because of its size or membership?*

A: it is led by three forceful personalities.

Q: *And what of our relationship with the now-decimated Kingdom? What do you see there?*

A: Well, I don't think reconciliation is possible or desirable as long as Ben is in the Kingdom. But I do think we should always leave the front porch light on. There will be future spasms. People who aren't even citizens of the Kingdom yet will one day run foul of Ben, and come seeking a healthier place. Some probably have already considered it. The only two people in the Kingdom I don't give a shit about are Ben and Amy. Beyond that, I'd feel a duty to hold the door for almost anyone else who chose to come to the Republic--even those I don't care for, or have histories with.

Q: *So, we're likely to be a refuge for the vilified Kingdomites? West Germany to Ben's East Germany?*

A: Good analogy. We will see the term 'R-Bug' just as we saw 'C-Bug', 'P-Bug' and so on. The difference is that Ben can't really build a [Berlin Wall](#).

Q: *But is that all the Republic is going to be? The place where those injured by Ben Madison can be a part of an evolving society? Or will we forge a less Ben-centric identity?*

A: I think that's what it will be to those in the Kingdom. for us in the Republic, I don't see us defining ourselves in terms of 'we're not Ben.' I see us defining ourselves in more positive ways. Rather than tell what we aren't, we will define who we are. And I think our future asylum seekers will see that, and it'll attract people.

Q: *It seems your vision of the Republic at present and in the near future is hopefully optimistic, both for yourself and the Republic.*

A: Unabashedly so. I have been given ample reason for that optimism. I think Ben will try every trick in his bag to get reactions from us. In most cases, we should just scoff and laugh and make a big joke of it. Ben uses ridicule well; if he tries to get us to hurt our own cause, he deserves some of his own medicine. But the difference is that we are actually amused, laughing, having fun.

Q: *Sounds like you follow [Saul Alinsky](#)'s rule concerning the use of ridicule: "There's no defense. It's irrational. It's infuriating."*

A: Alinsky was a great man. We miss him terribly.

Q: *And I have to thank you again for introducing me to his work.*

A: Glad to do so. I think his principles are instructive for us in the Republic. We have a powerful adversary, but he really can't hurt us unless we let him. Mostly we should just laugh, and make sure our people are having fun. When Mr Cooper and "Art Verbotten" resigned from the Regipäts, both had ceased to have fun. If I ever see the Republic becoming unfun, you can bet I'll say something about it.

Q: *Who, in the course of your exposure to Talossa, has changed the most, in your view?*

A: Very interesting question. I think it's been a huge growth experience for you.

Q: *In more ways than one. The Great Conflict taught me some strategy, easily.*

A: You came to Talossa at a relatively young age [Editor's note: 23, to be exact]. To a degree it has been the story of your twenties.

Q: *Certainly. It was only after I turned 30 that I began to fight the good fight in a way that I should have. But this isn't about me! (Laughs.)*

A: (Laughs.)

Q: *Is there anything that I haven't covered that you feel is necessary for you to cover in this interview?*

A: You didn't ask me who I thought the spy was. (Laughs.)

Q: *I figured you would indulge us if you felt the need. But now I'm extra-curious. (Laughs.) So... Who was the spy?*

A: Well, let's first profile a bit.

Q: *Okay.*

A: You'd be looking for someone with loyalist tendencies, preferably someone spineless, someone also in the TLP mailing counsels. I would rule out the actual TLP members. I would rule out Gjermund Higræff and Uglhán Cruceatúl. That leaves one person. That person would also have to have publicly shown as an invertebrate. Someone who acted like he was going to support me, then caved. The only person who fits all that is David Fauteux.

Q: *Oh? So you've felt it was Mr Fauteux all this time?*

A: I could be wrong. It could have been a verbal recon by fire on Ben's part. He could have just assumed that the TLP people talked me into coming back, and thrown some shit hoping it would stick. That would fit with his historical regard for the truth. But I tend to think he was tipped. And the only person I can think of who switched sides suddenly was David. After I was rejected, the group exchanged condolences and stuff for a bit, and I don't recall how privy to those David was. But there seemed to be information getting back to Ben. I can't prove this, but I've long believed it.

Q: *Well, you make a good argument.*

A: It began when Ben posted that TLP had talked me into it. That was either a random shot into the bushes or a careless outing of an inside source.

Q: *Any last words?*

A: Let's see. Thanks for giving me a chance to tell my side of a story that hasn't really been told from my standpoint. I don't pretend that all my motives were altruistic; after all, once Ben had begun to vilify me early and often, and poison people against me, I was bound to resent him and wish him ill. but I think about that less and less as time goes on, and more about the Republic and what it will be.

Q: *Well, thanks so much for cooperating and being a part of this. Hopefully we can talk about more of such things in the near future.*

A: I'll look forward to it. It's about time some of this stuff got out into the light of day. It's nice that people no longer consider me 'dishonest and insane.'

Q: *No more than you've earned. (Laughs.)*

A: (Laughs.) Stop that or I'll call down the fury of Poseidon on your ass!

William Cooper, 15-16 March 2005

Interviewer: J K Kelley

Color me naïve, though. For a long time I simply thought that all this stuff was made up and Ben wasn't serious. After all, we were supposed to be having fun, right?

Q: *Let's get the basic biographical stuff out of the way. Might I ask your age?*

A: I'm 53.

Q: *See why I call you 'Mr. Cooper?' (Laughs.) What sort of lines of work have you done? Educational background?*

A: (Laughs.) I went to high school of course, then spent some time in college, mostly playing, went into the US Air Force where I was an in-service recruiter, then after I got out, went to school to become a Health Care Administrator, and worked at that until 2 years ago. And now I'm presently unemployed until my chemotherapy is over anyway.

Q: *So most of your work experience is in health care management. How do you feel that affects your perspective on Talossa, if at all?*

A: I'm not really sure that it affects my perspective much. I mean, my job was to make sure that elderly and impaired individuals received needed treatment in a safe environment. About the only thing I developed in relationship to the job was more patience. Something I haven't much needed in the Republic, and which was no help in the kingdom.

Q: *Intriguing statement. Patience "was no help in the Kingdom?" Could you expand on that?*

A: I think it's the quality of patience that I have available to me. When it comes to someone I don't feel knows any better, like the frail elderly, impaired individuals, or animals even, I'm able to put up with a great deal of foolishness, pettiness, vindictiveness, and spitefulness. But I'm unable to come up with a great deal of patience with someone I think should know better. Maybe I should have said that patience was no help with the king instead.

Q: *Let's go back a bit further. How'd you first learn about Talossa?*

A: I was bored. I just started looking up stuff on Yahoo, when I came across micronationalism. It looked interesting, so I checked out several micronations, then hit Talossa, which seemed to be serious about itself while still maintaining an air of fun. So I checked out the message board, seemed like a pretty nice place with really intelligent people, so I threw my name into the hat, and the rest is history, so to speak.

Q: *Give us a look into your feelings in your first days of citizenship. What did you expect and hope for?*

A: I've always been attracted to people who I felt were more intelligent than I am. I felt I found a place with plenty of people like that, and they were friendly and welcoming, which is what I hoped for. I dropped into Talossa during a period of relative peace. The only negativity at the time seemed to be Ben's marriage and his posts about his wife, but I really paid no attention to those, since I felt he probably knew what he was talking about, and I didn't.

Q: *I know you can't speak for others, but you can give your perception. Do you reckon that many others shared that sentiment--that Ben knew what he was talking about better than they?*

A: Yes, I think so. I think most people felt that Ben had been used and he was lashing out in justifiable anger.

Q: *What was the first big Talossan controversy you can recall?*

A: The first one concerned Ben's marriage. Someone with religious leanings posted that they were against divorce. And all hell broke loose. I think at that time, I wasn't even a citizen. But again, I think there was a feeling that Ben's anger was justifiable simply because he was the injured party.

Q: *Does that seem like a tempest in a teapot now?*

A: I'm not sure that it does. I think anyone who's been through a divorce like that is going to feel angry, and a bit spiteful and vindictive. And someone telling you that they don't think you should be able to get a divorce is likely to set you off.

Q: *Okay. So this controversy didn't set off any warning bells in the back of your mind?*

A: Maybe just a little. I remember hesitating a bit before I decided to go ahead with submitting stuff for citizenship, but there had been no sign at that time that it was anything more than just an overreaction by someone who'd been hurt. Remember, none were speaking highly of his wife at the time.

Q: *True. Did you ever get to know the old TLP crew?*

A: Yes, though very slightly. That was my fault though, I was trying hard to fit in, so was going with the flow. Much to my regret.

Q: *What was your impression of them at the time?*

A: They were very nice people. I was having a hard time believing that they were "bad" people, who only wanted to ruin Talossa. Their demeanor said otherwise. But, I thought that there must have been things that went on before I found the message board that I didn't know about, and in fact, that's what I was told by Ben.

Q: *Did he lobby you in private about it?*

A: Actually no. He was right out front about it, posting on Wittenberg.

Q: *Speaking of controversial figures, you got to know one of the most colourful figures in Talossan history, Ronalt Rosais. Tell us a little about the Ronalt you know.*

A: Of course, I'd read Ár Päts, and the book by Ian Metáiriâ, so I was expecting someone whose goal in life was to disrupt Talossa in any way possible. Ron wasn't like that at all. Matter of fact, Ron was very into Talossa, especially on the provincial level as was I. Together, we formed the Vuodean Provincial Party, and started working on the Provincial Constitution with Ben's blessings. Ron has very definite ideas about things, but when approached he's very reasonable about trying to see your point of view. I was very sorry when I had to remove myself from the party due to personal reasons that had nothing to do with Talossa.

Q: *So is it safe to say you were glad to see him come to the Republic, and sorry to see him go?*

A: Yes. I don't know what went on with Ron here. But I would have liked him to stick around.

Q: *Where did your disenchantment with the Kingdom begin?*

A: With the TLP. I mean, I may not be the brightest bulb in the forest (sorry, one of my weird ways of putting things), but I can read. Once Ben started making up stuff that the TLP supposedly said that I knew was wrong, I figured that anything from before was probably made up too. Color me naïve, though. For a long time I simply thought that all this stuff was made up and Ben wasn't serious. After all, we were supposed to be having fun, right? Still, even after I realized what was going on, I tried to fit in by taking Ben's side. I never once considered the TLP would leave *en masse*.

Q: *What did you make of it when they all renounced?*

A: I was both flabbergasted and relieved. Flabbergasted because I never expected it. Relieved because I thought that just maybe things would get back to normal. Unfortunately, things did.

Q: *That's a statement that begs amplification.*

A: What I hadn't realized until then was that 'normal' was exactly what had just taken place with the TLP. The use of mostly imagined slights to Ben to demonize someone so he could hold them up as an example of why he had to remain vigilant in defense of Talossa, and why Talossa had to remain closed to any "bug" nations. And to prop up his visions of himself as a martyr whom everyone hated, though he didn't know why.

Q: *Looking back, why do you suppose he felt compelled to act in such a fashion?*

A: Ben's perceptions of himself as far as I can determine is of someone who is magnanimous, intelligent, giving and forgiving. I don't think he's ever been serious about Talossa being on its own without him. He may talk the part, but I don't think the reality bears him out. He's quick to point out what he's done in the past to bring about a Talossa without him, but in my opinion, they've just been lackluster attempts. And it's the same with almost every other facet about him. If he does anything that can be perceived as magnanimous, he's the first to bring it up as an example of his magnanimity, but it's really just a weak attempt at it. So then he can say to others "See, I'm magnanimous!" It's the same with his so-called martyrdom. At least, this is my opinion.

Q: *So you think he's delusional?*

A: Yes, I think he deludes himself. Lots of people do it though. (Laughs.) I like to think I'm a fairly nice person, but there are times when I delude myself about something I might have done that shows I'm not.

Q: *Okay. Do you think he believes his own propaganda?*

A: I think he tries. But deep down I think he knows better. I think that's why he tries to bring in everyone else into his way of thinking. He uses it to help delude himself.

Q: *After the TLP business opened your eyes, can you identify any other major events that increased your discontent before what let's call Grubi's PastGate?*

A: There were actually several things. One was Ben's reaction to me joining the RCT. My perception of politics at the beginning was that we were playing politics, I really didn't believe there was that much difference between the parties, especially RCT and the PC, so when they offered me a seat in the Cosâ, I decided to join them. After all, this stuff was supposed to be fun. Ben's reaction to me joining RCT was anything but fun. He basically accused me of being a traitor to the PC because my original intention was to become a member of that party. No amount of explaining to him that I didn't see a difference between the two parties -- so I had not felt I was betraying anyone -- ever convinced him. The other was our disagreement regarding Provincial Corts. I wanted to make a difference in Talossa. I'd read the constitution frontwards and backwards, and I was of the opinion that provincial corts should be operating. The constitution already set up the rules for provincial corts, I just wanted to get them set up. Ben was very vocal in his opposition to them, saying he didn't see the reason for them. So, we went through a period where we exchanged messages, me trying to explain why I felt it was needed, he explaining where he was opposed. I finally decided it just wasn't worth the argument. Imagine my surprise when I found that once I stopped talking about provincial corts, Ben started trying to get one set up in Vuode Province. His only reason for being against it was evidently that it wasn't his idea. If had been honestly opposed, I could have understood, but he wasn't honest about it. And that got me to thinking about everything else. About that time is when my offline world was falling apart, so my presence in Talossa was severely limited to maybe once a month for a long period of time. I always managed to get a vote in to maintain my citizenship. But that was about all.

Q: *So you had a very firsthand experience with Ben's concept of 'traitors.'*

A: Actually, only a small amount. I think it was really only a slightly over a week, then something happened with the TLP that took his mind off me, and put it back on them. I also think that he may not have been as upset with me as he was pretending. I still believe there was not that much difference between RCT and PC, and I think even he realized that.

Q: *Were you active when the Ben/Grubi feud started to heat up, or was real life the more prominent concern by that time?*

A: I was out of the loop then. By the time I was back, the Halloween Crisis had calmed down to a dull roar, but was beginning to heat up again.

Q: *So you came back to find that a reasonably steady stream of shit hitting the fan?*

A: Yes. I was looking to renew my contact with my fellow Talossans. Before I did that, I read all of Wittenberg I could. So I knew something had gone on. Unfortunately, that didn't prepare me for the continued rancor between Ben and Grubi.

Q: *What, at the time, did you expect the ultimate result of that rancour to be?*

A: I was afraid that it would be the same for Grubi as it was for the TLP. He's really tenacious though. I did take issue with Grubi over what he said to Ben concerning his mother. But other than that, I figured Ben was overreacting, as usual.

Q: *You expected it to end with Chris renouncing, driven out of Talossa.*

A: Yes.

Q: *When you saw that wasn't going to happen, then what did you make of the situation? Or did your own renunciation come first?*

A: When Grubi apologized, I thought maybe everything would be okay, I really expected Ben to not want to be outdone by someone else's magnanimity. I watched as the situation turned from bad to worse. When Ben checked into Grubi's personal life, I was taken aback at first, then I started getting angry. I knew I didn't join in the community to have my personal life checked out by someone I disagreed with. That I joined with the idea that this was supposed to be fun, and that it never really had been, irked me. Don't get me wrong, I enjoyed talking with the others, and being their friend. It's what made it worthwhile. But I could look back over the time I spend in Talossa, and any time being a citizen was less than fun, it was because of Ben.

Q: *Try hard to think back to the day you decided to renounce. Can you sum up in one word your feelings as you composed the post?*

A: Anger. But actually there was more. I was really upset that I had to leave people I considered friends behind.

Q: *You have a reputation as a very even-tempered, good-hearted guy. Could you describe in more detail what you were feeling?*

A: I was angry because what Ben did was to me a betrayal of the rules under which I agreed to join the community. I was angry because he was saying some really horrific stuff to people I cared about. I was saddened because I knew I couldn't continue to be a part of the community under those conditions. My original intent was just to request my personal information be removed from anywhere in Talossa's webpages. Not that I had anything to hide, it was just meant as a protest. But the more I wrote, the more I knew I needed to renounce my citizenship in protest, I figured it would maybe get more attention.

Q: *You succeeded, I think, but at the time did you just walk away and pay no further attention to Witt?*

A: No. I checked the next day to see if my account had been deleted. It hadn't, so I checked it out. I was floored by "Art Verbotten"'s renunciation. I had been agonizing over my own renunciation, his

own renouncement made me feel better about my own. I was still unhappy though, because of the people I felt I was leaving behind. Anyway, I kept reading Witt when I could. But I was in the hospital when the revolution came, so I missed it.

Q: *By this time, your real life had been falling apart. If it's not prying, could you give us some details?*

A: My step-dad had died, and as a result of bad dealings [business mistakes on his part], our business went under. That was the first thing. I had no job, and no prospects for any, because around the same time, my health went south. Finally, in May of this past year, I ended up in the hospital during which I was diagnosed with bladder [cancer], and then later prostate cancer. It took them over a month to diagnose the cancer, and another month for me to recover from being hospitalized sufficiently to return home. During that last month I was resident in a long-term care institution, also known as a nursing home. Since I had no insurance, and no money, it took a while for things to be set up for me to have surgery, and the doctors had to agree to do the surgery with the possibility of receiving no pay. I was lucky, I had very good doctors that had no thought to making money. I had surgery on the 27th of October during which my bladder and prostate were removed and my doctor set me up with a urostomy since I no longer had a bladder. It was a 12 hour operation, and took 2 weeks before they finally let me wake up, then another 10 days before I finally got to come home.

Q: *That's extremely traumatic. I think I safely speak for our entire citizenry when I wish you continued recovery. What's your prognosis?*

A: Thank you. There is no sign of cancer in my body right now, but we're still doing chemotherapy to get any that might be there that's not showing up. Otherwise, my prognosis, if I make it through the chemotherapy, is very good. I'll be checked every 3 months for 6 years to catch it in case it does reappear.

Q: *Excellent. So what shape were you in when you learned of the Republic?*

A: I was still pretty weak. I'd just gotten out of the nursing home, was still having a bit of problem sitting upright in a chair, but glad to be home to my computer. The first place I checked was Wittenberg. And once again was blown away, and joyful. Almost everyone I cared anything about in the Kingdom was here in the Republic! I was overjoyed, and with only a small amount of trepidation--I'd renounced my citizenship after all--[I] posted on the Republic's Witt. I was happy to be home.

Q: *Tell me how you feel we differ from the Kingdom.*

A: Friendlier. There's not a high level of stress here like there was in the Kingdom. Everyone seems happier, more welcoming. I like that.

Q: *The entire Republic is listening (but hey, no pressure). Whether you acknowledge it or not, people respect what you have to say. What guidance do you offer your fellow citizens as we embark on a new political era?*

A: Be serious about the Republic, but keep it fun. Continue to be open and welcoming to all comers.

Q: *Seems like good advice to me. Anything else you'd like to say before we conclude?*

A: I love the Republic. The most important thing that's happened to me recently is becoming a citizen of it. I would like to say that being a part of it has helped my mental status immensely during my recent illnesses. Thanks to all of you for allowing me to be a part of it.

Q: *And thank you, Mr. William Cooper. We all look forward to seeing your health allow you to take as great a role in the Republic as you desire.*

Chris Gruber, 21 March 2005

Interviewer: J.K. Kelley

Eventually, I honestly feel the Republic will be bigger than the Kingdom has ever been, given we're genuinely interested in fostering a community. This isn't simply self-aggrandising rhetoric; this is based on historical models. Or something.

Q: Let's flesh you out a bit with the obligatory bio paragraph: age, where were you raised, education level, marital status, basic professional experience.

A: Well, I just turned thirty-one this past March 12. I was born in New Jersey, but raised all over the country, but primarily New Jersey. I am in the process of finishing my associate of arts degree. I hope to work towards a PhD in public administration or political science, or obtain a law degree. I have some lofty ambitions. I am divorced, but engaged once again (this makes engagement number five, I believe). I am a technology support specialist and web designer by trade, running my own tiny business, Radiopedia Creative Industries. I got my start designing web sites in February 1997 when I was creating my first site for my own micronation.

Q: Five engagements. That makes you an engagement ace. Have you got the requisite five flags painted under the driver's side window of a vehicle?

A: No, (Laughs.) but that certainly is a good idea: Call me the Wed Baron.

Q: I have no room to talk. But speaking of your micronation, you had that as a boy, correct?

A: Yes, I did. My brothers and I would be allowed to sleep out in the family den during the summer of 1986. One night, during our discussions in the dark, I suggested starting our own country, using the house as a territory, first thing in the morning. And we did. I found a great name in the World Book encyclopedia in the Latin article. It had a bit about interesting English words which originated from disassociated Latin words. Being the 12-year-old liberal I was, I came up "pacare," which means "to make peace." Apparently, it was the source of the English word "pay."

Q: And thus Pacaria: With the benefit of age and reflection, what gap in your young world did this micronation fill?

A: Self-indulgence, just like any other micronation. (Laughs.) It also fostered my initial childhood interest in politics. And served as a vehicle for all sorts of other interests as well, from astronomy to sports.

Q: So it would be fair to say you were a very widely read young man with a rather precocious interest in politics?

A: To say the least, sir. I'm a nerd, and I seem to have always been.

Q: Try and think back, if you can, to your first impressions of Talossa: What was going through your mind?

A: Pacaria, actually. I found Talossa online after seeing the term "micronation" for the first time in January 1997. For some reason, I flashed on the idea of Pacaria: For years, I had been trying hard to reconcile my bizarre little hobby with adulthood. Then, in a whirl of ones and zeroes, it seems I had come across other adults, doing the same thing, but with more adults! I wasn't alone. And that's a beautiful feeling.

Q: *Where did you come in the cybercit immigration wave?*

A: Just after the first wave, I believe. The first wave included the Republic's own Gjermund Higræff. The second wave, in my opinion, started around the time the Clockwork Orange Party started up and Tomás Gariçéir joined the Kingdom. By the end of the second wave, Penguinia had begun. I joined the Talossan conversation around Independence Day 1997.

Q: *What was your first snap judgment of Ben Madison?*

A: "Damn, what a clever guy." I held him in instant admiration for having done what I failed to do: starting a goofy country and perpetuating it with friends. I never managed to get more than a single friend to join Pacaria: Ninety-five percent of Pacaria was on paper, anyway.

Q: *Didn't you become Seneschál in fairly short order?*

A: Pretty much. But it wasn't as simple as it may have looked at first.

Q: *How'd it come about?*

A: It was based on the fact that Dan Wardlow had his conflicts with Ben Madison. By early March 1998, after I had become a citizen, Dan left the PC. This was March 6, I believe. And then the PC leadership turned to me and asked me if I was interested in running for Prime Minister. I recall declaring on Wittenberg the famous William Sherman campaign promise.

Q: *You promised to torch Atlanta?*

A: No. (Laughs.) "If nominated, I will not run; if elected, I will not serve." I was swayed shortly thereafter, though. However, when Charles Sauls proved to be a non-entity as de facto PM, Ben finagled the rules of succession and swore me in late on March 29, 1998. I was so very surprised and honored.

Q: *So two months after joining, you were Seneschál. How would you describe your administration?*

A: I dove into the job with enthusiasm. And even though nice people who were in the PC leadership offered tonnes of advice, I was not about to be told what to do. Which is funny, since, until today, I've never told anyone about a single fact that was never resolved. It would have been a scandal back then if it had come out, I bet.

Q: *This should be interesting. Elaborate?*

A: It's not really that interesting, but still... I never fulfilled the book purchase requirement for citizenship. Not until I acquired three books during TalossaFest 2003, that is.

Q: *So technically you were a Cestour in office?*

A: No, no. If the Cosâ said you were a citizen, you were a citizen. It's just that the two people who were in charge of selling the books to prospectives never sold any to me. I didn't even pay for my copy of Ár Päts that Ben sent me prior to my formal application!

Q: *I see. What do you think of this in retrospect--your swift rise to PMship. Was that good for the Kingdom, in your view?*

A: I suppose so. It offered me the opportunity to see the process up close and give my own unique point of view when directing the government. The government (read: Ben) wanted to be particularly xenophobic in its foreign affairs with micronations. And I was particularly open in my view regarding micros. So I enforced a policy of open relations with reasonable micros, even getting two micros formally recognised by the Cosâ, until the weirdoes came out of the woodwork.

As the head of the government, I was harassed by various bathtub emperors for weeks until I implemented what I referred to at the time as the Great Wall of Talossa policy. I singlehandedly and unequivocally shut down communication with all micros from that point forward.

Q: *Why was Ben so xenophobic toward them?*

A: Same reason I became so. He was right about that, to a point.

Q: *Can you recall an entertainingly absurd example of one of these 'bathtub emperors'?*

A: I wish I could. I have done my best to forget them. I can remember one emperor who we never had any contact with. Nikhedonia: The young man named houseplants to his cabinet.

Q: *Shades of Caligula.*

A: You're not the first to make that comparison.

Q: *(Laughs.) I should hope not. Is it fair to say you were one of the Kingdom's longtime political heavyweights?*

A: Yes. And it was remarkable that I became one so fast, but more remarkable that I remained so. Newcomers have often been leaders, but few stuck around as strongly or as long. Also, until I came along, it had been a while since Talossa had managed to have a single year without changing PMs. I'd like to think I helped bring some sort of stability, a stability that was continued by two of my successors and good friends Michael Pope and Gödafrieu Válcadác'h.

Q: *Ben once described you as a real-life socialist, but a Talossan conservative. What is a Talossan conservative? A Talossan liberal?*

A: A Talossan conservative is someone who's conservative on Talossa-specific issues, obviously. I had always been an advocate for conserving the more traditional aspects of the Kingdom, including the language, Berber history, and for restoration of the 200-seat Cosâ. It was a matter of preservation vs. change rather than right vs. left.

Q: *So the party label 'Progressive Conservative' had an oxymoronic element to it?*

A: Sort of, but not really. Ben put it best when he said something like a conservative is someone who is loyal to their nation and a progressive is someone who's loyal to their nation's people. I rather liked that, and it was a big reason for me being proud to be a member of the PC for so damn long.

Q: *You were also one of the Kingdom's strong creative forces, perhaps its strongest. The Kingdom has lost that force. How do you think that has impacted it?*

A: Without a doubt, we devastated the Kingdom beyond repair.

Q: *I was speaking specifically about you and your creative input: Ascuns, for example. I see no evidence that anyone in the Kingdom has yet filled those clodhoppers. Do you think the loss of creative force was the most devastating long-term aspect of secession?*

A: It's one of the pillars, without question. Creatively and in respect to energy. There's no way they will ever be able to rebuild the Kingdom to its former glory. Ever. The people who left the Kingdom were not assorted cogs; we were all invaluable contributors in our own way. It's insane to think we could be "replaced" at all. Ben will never be able to find decent successors for those the Regipäts lost. Mark my words.

Q: *Duly marked. If I understand right, at one point, Ben practically canonized you for providing some piece of evidence that affected his case against the TLP. How do you see that in retrospect—was the evidence that damning?*

A: To a point. It was against the TLP only in that it proved that accusations against Dan Wardlow working with the Penguinians were true, accusations the TLP (among others) dismissed as Ben-inspired folderol. I personally see it as a vindication of my position, a position I still feel justified in holding, as I explained to my party-mate Miestrâ Schivâ, who was the person on the other end of those notorious e-mails.

Dan had chosen to run from the fight and gave very little to no reason for his secrecy in his reasoning. He went from having widespread support for his initiatives and policies to tearing his newly-formed party to shreds simply by running from the fight. With him in the PC or Peace and Freedom Party (PFPT), Dan could have taken the election easily, thereby assuring that Ben would have been one lone voice against the potential peace with Penguinia:

But Dan, for whatever reason, saw some other picture. He burned his bridges and assured the landslide I eventually oversaw in the March-April 1998 election.

Q: *So did the TLP lie, or were they simply betting on a weak horse by dismissing the allegations?*

A: To be honest, they were betting on the idea that Ben was full of it. As he usually is. I don't fault them for their position, but I did have a problem with certain folks for defending Dan for so long *even in the face of evidence*. It was "look; see? Dan was working with them." And of course they refused to acknowledge the truth, it seemed.

Q: *Was that really the genesis of Ben's long vendetta against the TLP?*

A: Not really. Ben always, with very little variation, held competing parties in some sort of contempt. Even if he was otherwise friends with their leadership. That would explain his magical, sudden hatred of me after I co-founded the Grey Congress Party (GCP).

Q: *I love it when an answer feeds directly into my next question. You were, so to speak, bound up with Ben in Kingdom politics for years before starting the GCP with Tomas Gariceir. To what extent was that PC an extension of Ben's will?*

A: The PC was, by the time the party started splitting into pieces, less of an extension of his will than it had been in years past. I don't know if I can accurately call it an extension of his will by the time I left the office of Seneschál in May 1999. He would try to get PC support, but the big flaw with the PC juggernaut was its complete lack of cohesion, something I despised. There was almost no real party platform beyond sloganeering and supporting Ben-friendly ideas.

That's why one of the first things I instituted in the GCP was the idea of party unity. So maybe a distinct difference could prevail. For so long, much of the appeal with of the PC lay not within policy but the idea of being granted power, of being attached to a brand associated with success. We were the New York Yankees, circa 1925-1962. For us to lose was an odd prospect indeed. But we essentially bought all the biggest talent in the league.

Q: *Seen from the outside, the PC looked very cohesive. So it was not internally so cohesive?*

A: Not in the least. It wasn't riddled with internal bickering or anything; it's just that there was no single direction planned. Our platforms, when we offered any, were de facto outgrowths of the traditional DAMP idea.

Q: *DAMP?*

A: As a techie, I now think of that as a Darwin/Apache/MySQL/PHP solution, but for years it stood for Democracy, Activity, Monarchy, and Patriotism. Democracy and activity were the "progressive" planks; monarchy and patriotism were the conservative planks. It was a big deal when the PC's last platform came out with the M unrepresented, instead replaced with a statement condemning the current monarchy. It was at that moment I knew that the PC was honestly showing solidarity with me in my conflict with Ben during the May-June 2004 election.

But it wasn't solidarity with me at that point, as much as it was a solidification of revolutionary forces, since by the time the election started, the Revolution was being planned for more than a month.

Q: *So for awhile you weren't sure where the PC was going to stand on the conflict?*

A: Well, I wouldn't put it that way at all. By that time, the PC and GCP had a joint mailing list and were planning strategies together.

Q: *So after the PC fragmented into three parts, how long did it take for your GCP and the rump PC to see that you had common political interests?*

A: I see we've skipped over a huge chunk of my Talossan history. (Laughs.) The PC and GCP

became pals immediately after the Hallowe'en Event. It was a mutual Ben-Victim Club, so to speak.

Q: *We'll step back to it. Tell us about the genesis of the Grey Congress Party.*

A: It came out of a haircut, of all things.

Q: *I could have joined. After my haircuts even then there was a lot of grey hair on the floor.*

A: Well, it's not as simple as that. I don't have grey hair and it was *my* haircut that started it all.

Q: *How so?*

A: I finally got a haircut I'd been trying to get various barbers and stylists to do for years. The style is crew-cut short on the back and sides, with a patch of combable hair on top, but blended in nicely so as to look decent. It's a 1930s-style haircut and it's my favorite style for myself. In fact, I still have that same haircut to this day. It's just that on that fateful November 2002 day, I finally got the damn thing the way I wanted it.

Q: *So how does this new 'do of yours lead to a new political party that ultimately shakes the world of Talossa?*

A: I took several pictures of myself with this nifty 'cut. And then, in a moment of artistic inspiration, I thought of Photoshopping my head onto the bodies of historical figures who had similar haircuts. That came from a remark I made when I posted to my blog about the haircut: "I had no idea it looked so Hitleresque." So, I used Macromedia Fireworks to paste my head onto fascist-style photos. I liked the finished product, since it was pretty cool to see me looking all pompous and stuff, so I emailed them to Tomás Gariçéir. At the time, Tomás and I were talking on the phone on a regular basis since I was teaching him the finer points of web designing with CSS. He encouraged me to post them to Wittenberg. Which I did.

Q: *But that's still more than a step away from the start of a new party, especially considering that you would be leaving the PC--and thus, to your knowledge, leaving the Madisonian embrace. What else happened?*

A: The reaction was incredible. Nearly everyone on Witt praised the images and I felt like a badass professional graphic designer. Ben expressed special interest, saying he was envious. But, a growing dissatisfaction with the PC, coupled with my growing friendship with Mr Gariçéir pointed me towards leaving the PC, an idea I had only toyed with in my head prior to that point. But it was the cool images that finally put the idea into action. Tomás and I agreed to start our own party.

Q: *Did you have any idea that the Black Hand (MN) was also preparing to split?*

A: Not a clue. Apparently they were planning an ideological, political split for some weeks before they announced. At least, that's the story Ben gave us the day they announced their formation. Which was one or two days after the GCP formally announced.

Q: *Indeed. The phrase 'stolen thunder' comes to mind.*

A: Yep, and completely unintentional on our parts.

Q: *Seriously?*

A: Yep.

Q: *Fair enough. Did you have any run-ins with Ben before BrewerGameGate?*

A: Yes. Once we split from the PC, then, in his eyes, it was game on. He jumped on us for planning the party in secret while remaining on the PC mailing list, saying it was disingenuous and sneaky.

Q: *So do you think you'd already made his little enemies list by the time you and Lisa traveled to TalossaFest?*

A: In a way. I think we were on table two. Ben has three stages for enemies. Table one is where you go when you're merely disagreeing with him on a single issue. You're a Competitor. Table two means he regards you as a threat, but not a serious threat. He's still willing to be friendly on some level, as he was with us, since we were calling him from the road during our drive up there. Table two folks are Rivals. Table three is where one goes when they've become a mortal Enemy.

Even after the initial run-ins with him in December 2002 over the GCP formation and the subsequent scandal commonly referred to as Advertgate, I remained a Rival. Ben will willingly invite Rivals over to his house for dinner, which he did with me and Lisa that first night we were in Milwaukee.

Q: *You said 'we.' That implies that Ben didn't consider Lisa her own Talossan person, merely an extension of you. Is that fair to say, or had she had her own personal run-ins with him before that TalossaFest?*

A: No, that's accurate. Despite his accusations of me being a misogynist, Ben is endowed with a healthy dose of misogyny, at least when it comes to male citizens' female significant others. Maybe it's not misogyny in a complete sense. Maybe it's simply just that he disregarded all significant others as non-entities, since so few had ever contributed anything to Talossa: But, no, they never had a single run-in.

Q: *Remember when he was heaping scorn on his former wife, 'Queen Jenny?' Did you see any misogyny in that expression of Ben's anger?*

A: Not completely. I saw it as an angry man lashing out at his failed marriage. I cannot completely blame him for feeling that way, despite the fact that he did go about it in the wrong manner. Ben got taken in by a green-card seeker and couldn't believe that the Almighty Genius of Madison could be duped. But, there it was, plain as day. Ben handles his failures worse than just about anyone I've ever met.

Q: *So the short version of the Jenny story is that he had a ticket to the land of Disney and Wal-Mart in his pants?*

A: If by "in his pants," you mean "in his wallet." I have doubts Ben got laid before he turned 37.

Q: *I'll get you for painting that imagery into my mind. But on the subject of BrewerGameGate, to hear Ben tell it, you basically came in and started waving your dick around. I think you have a different version.*

A: Heh, indeed. For one, my dick was safely snug in its home. (Laughs.) Okay, I apologise for that. It's like this: I have a weird system for testing people's limits, since I want to know if someone has a weakness or is, in my eyes, "worthy" enough to be my friend. My sense of humour is my method. It's abrasive and can be considered downright rude to most objective observers. But I usually mean no harm, even to those whom I offend. I simply want to see if the person in question will toss the ball back to me or cringe. Social role-playing is a peeve of mine, so I use my joking moment as the opportunity to find out if the subject is willing to break out of the so-called "proper" role.

In this case, we were promised by Ben that we would be viewing Talossan videos when we arrived back at his and Amy's house. When I saw that Amy was raptly watching the Brewers game, I pushed it a little. I mean, hey, we were promised. Ben never said anything about giving Amy the TV when he had several out-of-state guests waiting to watch the videos. Part of my feeling is that when you're intent on watching a game of that--ahem--calibre, you should be willing to move your arse out of the way and allow your guests to view what they were promised. Let's be honest, the 2003 Brewers were just arse on the field, and it was the middle of July. Expecting that Amy would watch the game in a different room is not an unreasonable thing to think.

And, once I pushed Ben a little on the subject, saying playfully "Hey, you promised us videos," he kept telling me "Amy's watching the game; we'll just have to wait." Part of me was pissed that she was being so damned selfish and rude to all of these guests, some of whom drove for *twenty-two hours straight*, part of me was pissed that a husband couldn't say boo to his wife, and part of me was in playful enough a mood to test the limits.

Q: *Let me interject here, if I may. Could part of it have also been that you had been in a car for twenty-two hours and were tired, sore, cooped up, and all the other side effects? After I've driven distances not quite so long, I've been at less than my best.*

A: Not completely. This was the day after we arrived.

Q: *Ah. That helps. Please continue.*

A: Anyway... I spoke up so Amy could hear me: "So how about those videos?" and Ben explained once more that Amy was watching the Brewers game. I shot back, smartarsedly, "Why bother? It's the Brewers; it's not like it's a *real* team!" She gave me the Infamous Glare of Doom, to which I am immune (thanks, Mom!). Both Lisa and I laughed at my remark, since, c'mon, it's funny.

Q: *You profaned the sacred.*

A: And besides, as an athlete yourself, you'd understand, some competitive ribbing is to be expected amongst sports fans. I fully expected her to make a remark about my favourite team, the Yankees. The fact that it would later become a point of contention blew my mind.

Q: *So that's it, the incident. And at that time you had no idea that you'd won the Queen Amy Hate sweepstakes?*

A: Well... to be honest, I knew I had raised her ire, but I didn't really give a tinker's damn. I had heard stories about her trying to dominate conversations, gearing the attention towards herself time

and time again, even during Talossa-related gatherings. To say the least, she's a blabbermouth. "Art Verbotten" was right when he told me that; she cannot shut up to save her life. So, she excluded herself from the rest of the proceedings from that moment forward. When I was informed that the reason she didn't come along was because she didn't care for me, I believe I said something like "Oh well; it's not like I care." More than a few of us had a good laugh at that. But I had no idea that Ben had any issue with me.

Q: By your own admission, your conduct there was abrasive--even though it could be taken either way. Would you likely have been that way with any wife Ben might have had, even one with a genial, warm reputation, or were you in a sense sending Amy a message?

A: Neither, really. I pretty much play things by ear in social situations. Despite my whole "friend test," I don't put everyone through that. The night before, at dinner with the Madison-Durnford contingent, I got a strong impression of Amy as the Social-Sitch Dominatrix. I guess you could say I was letting her know I wouldn't do like the other guests did: sit silently while she pushed us aside. Some of the group were quiet by nature, some were just being polite, but either way, I hate when someone tries to do to my friends what she did.

Q: Okay. So there was an element of a message: you weren't going to let her domme you.

A: Sure. Yes. Indeed. I hate that attitude of "owning" a situation. She was only peripherally Talossan, if you think about it. And then she felt she had the right to tell us to wait our turn at the table, when Andy Lowry had flown from Arizona, Tomás Gariçéir had flown from Massachusetts, Gödafrieu Válcadác'h had flown from Houston, and Lisa and I had driven from Florida just to visit Ben and our other Talossan friends. She treats people like property. I don't respond well to such behaviour.

Q: I can see why. What did she mean by having to wait your turn at the table? I mean, in my home no one, and I mean no one, is seated at our table until Deb is seated and ready to eat. I'm not rude to them, but they will do as I say, no matter who. Was it such a situation?

A: I didn't mean she said it literally, but figuratively. It was not unlike your situation, but the problem is, Ben never gave anyone any house rules or warning about the Social-Sitch Dominatrix. As far as hospitality goes, I follow this rule: you're my guest, so it's my responsibility to apprise you of any boundaries I'd like you to adhere to.

Q: That's how I feel. If you don't seem to follow my lead, I'll let you know in a way that enables you not to lose face. So she was bossier about it?

A: To say the least. She simply expected us to know that it was her turf and that she will step on anyone who steps in her way. My house is my castle, too, and I will allow no one to violate it. But I will be damned if I don't treat my guests with warmth and friendliness. My home is there for them to enjoy, too. Maybe it's some cold, emotionless Midwest thing I don't know about. Either way, it was pretty damned arrogant of her and pretty damned weak-willed of Ben to not bridge the gap in some way.

Q: I think what you're driving at here is that it wasn't a hospitable environment in the sense of friendly acceptance and guidance as to expectations. Would you describe her home as an etiquette

minefield?

A: Oh, you bet. *Forgivetz-moi* for not being Little Miss Prissy Pants with white gloves and a bonnet.

Q: *This interview is creating a series of harrowing images. I will begin drinking now.*

A: If you must, sir. If you must. (Laughs.)

Q: *I must. So on the way home from T-Fest, tell us what impressions you and Lisa shared, if you will.*

A: We were incredibly excited. We really did not want to leave. The goodbyes took a lot longer than they should have, since I hated saying goodbye to everyone. I recall taking a picture of the back window of my car, with Milwaukee receding in the distance, and saying to Lisa, "I miss it already." She said, "I know."

Q: *So this despite the Madame l'Etiquette social minefield. What enabled the trip to overcome that negative side in such an overwhelming way for both of you?*

A: We got a huge charge of sitting with these people, talking with them, shaking hands, hugging, arguing, and just plain being Talossan in their presence. Going to TalossaFest was a defining moment for us, no doubt. I loved nearly every single minute of it. That's why this little tiff with Amy was so weird. It was a trifle, something to be easily forgotten. And somehow it became something big in her mind. Go figure.

Q: *But later on, Ben made a lot of accusations about you that made 'Amy didn't like him' seem pitifully small by comparison. Which one offended you the most?*

A: Being accused of being a woman-beater. For that, above all else, I doubt I could ever forgive him.

Q: *Have you ever seriously contemplated suing him for libel?*

A: Yes. Yes, I have. Although, I need to prove that he has actually damaged my reputation, which is very, very hard to prove.

Q: *Obviously you've at least asked a legally knowledgeable person a couple of questions.*

A: I've done the research myself. I am, after all, contemplating a possible career in law. And that is one of the ways I took Ben on under his rules and beat him.

Q: *After your falling out with him, Ben changed his 'history' to paint you as first worthless, then awful. Had you ever seen him do this to anyone before?*

A: Not to such a significant degree. I'd seen how he painted the Androids, but, according to all available evidence, the Androids *really did* behave as described. And, I've seen him dramatically vilify a few others. But I was never given any reason to doubt his word outright; I'd simply adjust the exaggeration to realistic parameters. But what he did with my story is outright Stalinesque.

Q: *But you had smelt the feces of the ox wafting from his prose before, at least to a degree.*

A: (Laughs.) That's one way of putting it, I suppose.

Q: *He once said that if you came back to TalossaFest, there might be a fight. Let's imagine you had, and Ben actually carried out this threat of violence. How do you think you'd have reacted?*

A: Yeah, he essentially issued a veiled physical threat to me. But I can tell you that, having seen me next to him, you would put your money on me. When I told Lisa of the threat, she doubted it was real. Once she saw it for herself, she said, "Is he NUTS? He's threatening YOU?" I mean, look, I'm overweight, to be sure, but a lot of my weight gain over the last few years is just as easily attributed to muscle mass. I have thick arms, as you can see in some of my pictures. I'm pretty strong. So, it's weird to imagine Ben trying to start a fist fight because I "set foot in Milwaukee." Reminds me of something my mother once threatened.

Q: *But what would you have done?*

A: In the case of an actual physical confrontation?

Q: *Yes. That's the meat of the question. Let's say he escalated the confrontation into a physical one, say by shoving you. What happens next?*

A: I'd do what I usually do: parry or dodge any immediate threats. I hate fighting. But if he kept it up, even swinging directly at me, I would try to end the fight. I have only twice gotten into a fight with someone since being an adult, and in each, my immediate reaction is to defend myself. My secondary mission is to subdue them and end the fight. In the second fight I had, I was successful in stunning the person with blows to the back of the head and then pinning them to the ground so they couldn't do any more damage. I have enough physical strength to seriously hurt someone, but I respect that strength enough and understand my temper enough to not go there. I only want to end the fight. And that's how such a confrontation would likely go if Ben were to start something.

Q: *Rather at odds with the violent way he's tried to portray you. I've painted a picture in which he's assaulted you, and you've got fairly broad legal sanction to kick the shit out of him. Yet you don't want to.*

A: No, I don't. I have little taste for outright fights, since I was so heavily abused growing up. I was beaten soundly nearly every third day of my life until I was almost 20. Why would I want to engage in physical confrontation? Ben's assessment of me is a myth he created, which is how he tries to discredit those who have a genuine beef with him.

Q: *Did he ever serve you with a restraining order?*

A: Not that I know of. I believe in order for him to obtain such a thing, he would have to show a reasonable fear of being attacked. But, different states have different laws. That's something he didn't know about my past.

Q: *You were once roundly condemned for suggesting that Ben do as his mother once did: up and die. Ben tried to twist that into a death threat. How do you imagine you'd feel if you got the news*

that he'd suddenly died, say in his sleep?

A: I'd probably feel nothing. I don't hate him, but I don't have that all-too-"Christian" pity for him, either. When I made the remark I made, I did it to get a reaction out of him, to make him feel as hurt as he was making me feel. And, until some people who *aren't* Ben spoke up, even Ben didn't react to it. He may claim to take offence to this very day, but it's purely for show. He pretty much ignored the remark at the time. Seems to me, if one is offended, they don't take two days to express that offence.

Q: *Ben steamrolled a lot of people. You were the one he couldn't steamroll. I'd like your opinion: how do you think that realization struck him?*

A: I think it scared him. I'm the one thing Ben couldn't handle: I'm his better in nearly every way, if you'd allow me a moment to indulge my ego.

Q: *I'll indulge it further; I'll pick your brain and get all the analysis of his psyche you'll give me. I suspect that life has made you a pretty good judge of character. Use that skill now on Ben Madison, if you would. To what extent does he believe his own propaganda?*

A: As much as Hitler believed his, to be quite honest. I've recently read a book on the pathology of Adolf Hitler, which figures out the cause of his biggest psychological problems. And Ben shares a lot of things in common with him. Yeah, yeah, I know: Godwin's law and all that. But that only applies if you have no actual evidence.

Q: *Godwin's Law is for arguments, not interviews, so it does not apply here. But Ben does seem to have a lot of influence over people, at least up to a point. Why do you think that is?*

A: Same reason Hitler did. It's the classic definition of charisma. According to this book, "Hitler's influence over people came from his inadequacy. His desperate sense of ineffectiveness made him try to dominate everyone." The author goes on to quote Goethe: "He who knows not how to rule his inner self would gladly rule his fellow men according to his own arrogant conceit."

To put it even more simply, Ben seems to offer something to people. For you, he seemed a kindred wacky spirit. For Tomás Gariçéir, he was a kindred linguistic spirit. For me, Ben was a fellow politics/history/language/constructed world buff. His charisma allows each of us, at least initially, to see what we want in him. And, to some extent, we are right about that. He's managed to be all things to all people on some level. But his own weaknesses eventually cause even his admirers to fall out of favour.

The book on Hitler, called *Hitler: The Pathology of Evil* by George Victor, is utterly fascinating in and of itself due to the fact that some of the greatest atrocities were carried out as a result of one man's psychological issues, but it is equally fascinating for the student of Talossan history. One passage that struck me was the one that started "Among those mesmerized [by Hitler] were Germany's most educated." Put that bit in the context of Ben and Talossa and you start to see how someone like Ben can win people over so well.

Q: *Do you think this is just an innate talent of his, or do you think it's specific to Talossa and his unique position as its founder?*

A: It's an innate talent of his. Although I wouldn't necessarily use the word "talent," as it primarily has a positive connotation. If Gödafriëu Válcadác'h or Mark Hamilton had founded a Talossa, they

would not have done what Ben had done. Neither would I. He thrust his at-home hobby onto his friends and then got them to essentially obey his whims. That's unreal. I don't know anyone else in Talossan history who could have done the same thing to the same level of success he had.

Q: *You got a firsthand look at his home life. When I think of influence, the rumour is that his current wife in turn has a lot of influence over him. Is this true?*

A: Oh, heavens, yes. That boy is whipped like cream.

Q: *One last on this subject, then we'll move on. Few of your readers have met Ben in person. Please describe for us his personal interactive style; what's it like to kick it with him?*

A: He's an incredibly friendly fellow. If you have something in common, he will happily engage you in a conversation. He's intelligent, well-read, funny, and well-spoken. He's not horribly rude and he doesn't tend to talk over you. All in all, a very pleasant experience. But it essentially hides what's going on underneath.

It's no coincidence, I believe, that he seems to change his behaviour when at a keyboard. It's a fear issue. If he bullies you when you're right in front of him, he doesn't know if you'll kick his arse or not. This goes double for big guys like you, me, or "Art Verbotten". He's more likely to play nice with us. But, behind the keyboard, everyone's on the same level, except intellectually. So he feels he's finally got an advantage. One of his biggest weaknesses is his faith in his superior intellect. He'll bully you intellectually, not always playing fair, and then when a decent person like yourself says "To hell with this," he steps in to declare victory.

He treats intellectual conflicts like a professional wrestler treats matches: he will play by the rules only as long as he can totally dominate you. Otherwise, he'll cheat like an Enron accountant.

Q: *So if he isn't allowed to tilt the foosball table toward his opponent, he doesn't like to play?*

A: Pretty much. He cannot stand the thought of losing, much less the actual loss. Which is why I think he descended into extra-Talossan measures to get at me. I took him on, on his own terms, and kept him from beating me. He got so frustrated with his failure to win, he lost it. He had to find some advantage, so he came up with the bizarre idea of investigating my criminal record. That was the only way left, as he saw it, to best me. And then that ultimately failed, since it was the single act that led directly to the Revolution.

Q: *But that 'criminal record' opened the lid on some of the personal adversity you've had to face. Will you share some more of that with us, both the distant and more recent past?*

A: I've been homeless, I've had bad relationships, I've handled my resources badly. That, in a nutshell, explains my misbehaviour as a young adult that led to my meagre criminal record. I have been arrested twice: once for shoplifting, once for failing to appear in court regarding a bounced check. I've had a single restraining order taken out against me by an ex-girlfriend. The reason for the order was a reaction to a Florida statute that says people who have lived in a house for six weeks or more cannot be removed without cause. I was told by a cop that she couldn't simply kick me out, but I agreed to leave the very next day so as not to cause a problem. My ex-girlfriend asked the cop what she could do to remove me, and the cop offered the possibility of a restraining order. So, I left, and she went and got a restraining order against me, so that I couldn't come back. Simple as that.

It had absolutely nothing to do with violence. Ben kept offering it as "proof" of some imagined

"history of violence" I've never had, saying that was the only reason in the world to get such an order. He applied Amy's situation with her ex to my ex-girlfriend's. He basically convinced himself that he knew the whole story. When it was revealed to him by several people over and over again that my ex-girlfriend herself had the order lifted, he refused to believe it, making weird claims of how I "avoided being served" the order. Restraining orders don't have to be served in the state of Florida in order to be enforced. And there doesn't need to be any evidence of violence to issue one. Ben's mistake was that he took his weak knowledge of Wisconsin law to assume similar conditions in Florida. Which there aren't.

Q: *But in addition, you've alluded to some serious adversity growing up. How do these life experiences affect your reactions to matters in Talossa? I couldn't ask that of everyone and hope for candour, but if you are anything it's self-honest.*

A: I try to be. I think being abused as a child has caused me to be overly cautious when I think someone might be trying to manipulate me. This caused me to have my first conflict, albeit a small one, with Ben within my first three to four months as Prime Minister. I also have a tender empathy for those who may be abused, which is the source of my frustration over how Ben has treated many of my Talossan friends, including Gödafiëu Válcadác'h and Tomás Gariçéir. Ben can say what he wants about me, but I'll be damned if I'll allow him to hurt them.

Q: *What was this incident of conflict? The difference in opinion about other micronations?*

A: That was part of it, yes. I remember telling him something along the lines of "Ben, I run this government; you don't. This is how we're going to operate until I say otherwise."

Q: *How'd he take it?*

A: He seemed to take it well at the time. He just wanted his protests to be formally noted. To his credit, he didn't give me "I told you so" when I came across the bug nations' demands.

Q: *You also deal with some personal mental health issues, correct?*

A: Yes. In 1993, I was diagnosed with clinical depression. Which is something I've never hidden from anyone nor used as an excuse.

Q: *Do you take medication for it?*

A: I used to, when I had a regular counselor. Zoloft.

Q: *You're off it?*

A: Yes, sir, I am. When you neither have medical insurance nor a counselor, it tends to work that way. (Laughs.)

Q: *Don't get me started on our medical system or I'll fuck this up royally. Anyway, let us now go back to the night of Lisa's renunciation from the Kingdom in an anguished post. She mentioned you had gone off into the night. Tell us the story of that painful night.*

A: I can't remember the proper sequence of events, but I'm sure a cursory glance of the posts would remind me.

Q: *As best you recall.*

A: I do remember that something Ben did or said got me very angry. Angry enough to start yelling, very loudly. Lisa wanted to know why I would flip out and I just got pissed that Ben was seemingly allowed to act any way he chose and almost no one would publicly call him on his behaviour. I said I was sick of no one taking my side, and stormed out of the house with the car keys. I got in the car and drove out, down the highway about 25 miles. I then turned around and came right back.

When I saw what happened on Witt after that, I fumed for quite a while after that. When I lose my temper, I lose it in a grand manner. To put it lightly. Lisa was freaked out about my behaviour and was crying and angry. She posted her big Fuck You to Talossa, sick of what qualities it was bringing out in me over the previous six to seven months. Let's just say I had lost my temper in a similar manner three or four times prior to that, almost always for the same reasons. She stated that she was voting None as an act of protest over the whole damn process. And Ben, ever the craven opportunist, took the moment to roll in his own fecal matter, so to speak, reveling in the apparent discord in the GCP. He instantly registered the None Party and claimed Lisa's "vote."

Michael Pope later told me that was the last straw for him (if I recall his words correctly).

Q: *Do you think your clinical depression made you more susceptible to getting so worked up over such things?*

A: Absolutely. I've lived with self-loathing all of my conscious life. Dealing with the idea of fighting for what I think is right, and being told privately that I was right then seeing little to nothing being done to vindicate me... that just sent me reeling. I hate being rejected. But I really hate my abuser getting away with his or her abuse.

Q: *He didn't, though, in the long term...or do you feel he did?*

A: I don't think he did. In the end, I took his toy away from him, in a manner of speaking. He wasn't punished to the full extent I would have preferred, but he got his. As a result, the Kingdom is doomed to revert to a one-man hobby. But, to paraphrase Jason Lee in one of my favourite films, *Mallrats*, "That's what he gets for fuckin' with me." (Laughs.)

Q: *I don't think you'd contest me if I said you were straightforward to a fault. Is there anything you can remember saying in Talossa that you'd like to take back?*

A: Yes. I wish I'd never told him to drop dead. The rest of my remarks I've either paid for in full or still don't regret. But that one remark I regret simply because of the collateral damage it caused thanks to Ben's reaction.

Q: *Besides that, is there any one big regret you have about your Talossan experience?*

A: I wish I would have been more judicious in my manner and methods. I tend to be a tiger, ravaging anything and anyone I feel has wronged me in some way. But I think my moments that I failed to use proper strategy have sort of marked me, alas.

Q: *Has anyone gotten the short end of the Talossan stick in the wake of the final crisis that led to secession?*

A: Yes. Tomás Gariçéir comes to mind first. Gödafrieu Válcadác'h also does. He has a bad habit of taking on too much blame for events that go wrong. I've explained to him that the Hallowe'en Event was Ben's fault, not his own. And Devin Burr, to be sure. His heart was in the right place, but his lack of viewing the conflict in the proper context sort of distorted his opinions. There's probably others, but I cannot recall all of them at this late hour.

Q: *How and when did the idea of the Republic first occur to you?*

A: I have the very email that started it for me. It was 24 November 2003, after Michael Pope had pointed out to the PC/GCP mailing list that we could not allow Ben to have the upper hand in any negotiation. My response: "Let me declare it unequivocally now, just so there's no confusion: I am calling for the removal of Ben from the Throne and the eventual removal of the monarchy. Talossa has no use for the monarchy any more. The time has come for a Talossan republic. Ben is bad for Talossa, ESPECIALLY as King."

Mention of the Republic in that e-mail predates any suggestions by J.P. Griffin or Marti-Paír Furxhéir. The idea didn't take off immediately, but as things got worse, I pushed it more and more.

Q: *So you were the first to use the word 'Republic' in private counsel, to your knowledge?*

A: Absolutely. I don't mean to act like I am somehow the end-all be-all of the Republic, but that's where it all began. As an idea to remove Ben from the throne.

Q: *Your thinking then was that you would find a way to sack Ben. Could it have been done?*

A: At the time, I was convinced we could have done it, but it would take a lot of work. A handful of people, including Michael Pope and Matthias Muth, agreed. But, looking back, there's no way, legally within the OrgLaw, to do so. Hence the ultimate frustration that led months later to the secession plan.

Q: *You've come out pretty strongly against any reconciliation with the Regipats. Long term, then, how do you see the Tale of Two Talossas unfolding?*

A: I see the Kingdom atrophying and withering into nothingness. The Republic's presence on the world stage will cause it to overshadow the peak of the Kingdom. We've deliberately made every effort to avoid allowing power to become so concentrated in one person's hands that only democracy can come of our efforts. As long as that is true, and as long as people are attracted to our community, we should be able to continue and thrive for a long, long time. Eventually, I honestly feel the Republic will be bigger than the Kingdom has ever been, given we're genuinely interested in fostering a community. This isn't simply self-aggrandising rhetoric; this is based on historical models. Or something. (Laughs.)

Q: *You and I have served on the Constitutional Committee, where our job was basically to take away all our sneaky ways to grab and hold power. I've always suspected that Ben had at least half a dozen Organic Law weapons he had thought of, with infinite leisure, that no one would know about*

until he let fly with them in extremis. Do you agree?

A: I think he *thinks* he has, since he tried one last time to do something like that to Marti-Pair Furrhéir just before the Revolution occurred. But that's part of why he hates me as much as he does. I took on his feeble legal argument and destroyed every one of his points. It's not the legalistic maneuvering that helps him retain power; it's his pocket vote crap. As long as he maintains his army of obedient voters, he can change anything he wants to change. To him, all laws are thermoplastic.

Q: *Marti-Pair's canning Ben as Deputy SoS really shook things up, didn't it?*

A: Indeed, it did. But it was a good move, one that I advised M-P to take. You see, he wanted to make sure that whatever strategy he pursued, it was legal and defensible in the Uppermost Court. After going over the OrgLaw, I assured him that there was nothing Ben could do about his own being fired.

Q: *Except piss and moan.*

A: We anticipated the lawsuit over the election rules, which is why they were written the way they were. None of the Deputy SoS election rules stuff occurred before M-P consulted me first as his legal counsel. He retained me for actual cash, to be honest.

Q: *You mean he sent you money?*

A: Not quite. The party registration for that election was \$5, if I recall correctly. M-P offered me \$5 for me to be retained as legal counsel. Since he was also SoS, you can see how that \$5 I earned was spent. The GCP got itself registered, and M-P got his professional legal counsel. As far as I know, I'm the only legal counsel in Talossan history to accept a payment of any actual monetary value. And on top of that, I earned every penny by winning the case big-time. It's still one of my proudest moments as a Talossan.

Q: *But of them all, what's your proudest?*

A: To be honest, before 1 June 2004, I would have said being a part of TalossaFest or being sworn in as Seneschál. But, looking back, fighting for and helping achieve the Republic is as good as it gets. We've really created something special here. I don't get my way every day in the Republic, but not once in the Republic, have I flipped out the way I did just months prior to the Revolution. Knowing that these other people felt the same way I did and were willing to take such a drastic stand... that's amazing to me.

Q: *You haven't flipped out, but you've spoken pretty strongly more than once. A credible observer might sense that you were losing your cool. When you title a post "FUCK YOU," that's pretty strong language. Do you ever regret speaking as bluntly as you often do?*

A: Oh, indeed I do. I wish M-P and I could have resolved our issue in private and I wish I hadn't been so pissed that day, but there it is, forever. All I can do is own up to my mistakes and work to avoid them in the future. I hope I can honestly say that I have learned from many of my mistakes in the past. And I hope that people will notice a change for the better.

Q: *Fair enough. Who's the citizen or Friend of the Republic you've known longest, and for how long?*

A: Ián Anglatzar; and I came in to the Kingdom together in February 1998. He was my SoS at one point. I'd like to believe we've been friends throughout all of this time. Although, I've dealt with Matthias Muth a tad longer, since he was a Justice assigned to screening me as a prospective. Muth and I found a connexion when I said my favourite book was *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*. The whole of the Talluminati -- which does not exist, no matter what the conspiracy theorists say -- was our creation in early 1999. So between those two, I'd say those are my *longest* Republic-related relationships.

Q: *Tomás Gariçeir is the strongest non-Ben proponent of el glhep Talossán in the Kingdom. You have known him well. Do you think he'll ever join the Republic?*

A: God, I wish he would. He's pretty much the Talossan I've been closest to (if you don't count Lisa, of course), and I still talk to him on a semi-regular basis. But I've learned to keep the conversation with him about languages, since he and I are working on a language together, as well as his help in getting me to learn some Talossan! I think he'll only join the Republic once and if the Kingdom implodes from the 'net scene. I doubt he'll ever do another TalossaFest again, though. This war zapped his energy for Talossa for the most part. God, I did everything I could to sway him to our side, believe me. It still hurts my heart to know he's "over there."

Q: *Do you think Ben has pressured him to cut us all dead?*

A: Not really. I think after Tomás' inspired outbursts regarding the language on the FakeWitt, Ben may have gotten the message that he's slowly losing Tomás's automatic support. Tomás is not much of a fighter and seeks to avoid fights for the most part. I'm really proud of him for standing up for what's right. Ben may be seeing that, if he loses Tomás, he will have lost the last person interested in knowing the language fluently. So he's most likely playing it cautious from here on out. If he doesn't, he will have made Tomás' mind for him.

Q: *How do you suppose Ben feels, knowing that basically he's the loss of one key citizen away from obscurity, and that the power is not in his hands?*

A: Desperate, to say the least. He's been relatively quiet lately, making only pointed barbs at individuals like myself (mostly to antagonise me into a public fight, I'd bet), knowing that he'd lose another big public fight. I'm fully prepared to go to the mattresses against this guy one more time, for now, with the support I've got in the Republic, my cause is truly just. Correction: *our* cause is just. I let my ego slip away for a second there. (Laughs.) But my point stands: he's been marginalised big time and cannot afford another full-on war. So he's playing it guerilla. Either way, he's turning into David Koresh.

Q: *Is there a way that a public fight can occur? You can't post there. He can't post on our Witt.*

A: I'm sure, that if a public fight was going to break out in some form, it would. And, yes, if I wanted to, I could post over there. Any one of us could, since there's no real security on their FakeWitt. And if he sent in a contingent of supporters posing as Friends, we could take them down one by one, without necessarily simply banning their accounts. The primary reason we instituted accounts in the first place was to avoid bugs and board-spammers. It's not about censorship. I am not saying I know *how* a public fight would occur; I'm just saying that there's bound to be a way,

and if it occurs, we will win again. Except, we'd pretty much wipe him off the map entirely.

Q: *You've expressed plans to run for President; if you're elected, your every action will set a President Precedent. Tell us what sort of pattern a Gruber Presidency would seek to establish for the office.*

A: Interesting question. I've not thought of it in those terms before.

Q: *Then do so now, if you would.*

A: Well, I think I'd mostly like to set basic precedents: procedure, for example. And policy is more personal to the individual president and his party, so anything I do specifically policy-wise would not necessarily be imitated or adopted. Procedure, for damn sure. And the willingness to use power in a heavy-handed way would be cautious, I'd hope. There's a certain amount of power a Head of State has. I'd hope that we'd learned our lessons from the Kingdom and be judicious in our plans. I'd also like to set any and all presidents to be regarded as statespersons worthy of respect. Is there anything specific you had in mind?

Q: *Open-ended question. That would be about the worst place I could think of to ask a leading question.*

A: Yeah, seems so to me. It's open-ended enough that I'm not sure how to put my answer. I hope that I've done your question justice.

Q: *As the Thelemites say: "There is no grace; there is no guilt. This is the law: do as thou wilt."*

A: Ah, a little Crowley in our interview. How oddly refreshing.

Q: *And now we come to a lighter note. This has been a very long interview with a buttload of serious, intrusive questions. Since that offends my native sense of manners and priorities, and you're known as a funny man and storyteller, tell us the funniest thing you've ever seen happen in Talossa.*

A: God, that's a tough one. I got quite a laugh out of the Brewers remark. I guess I'd have to say that the dinner at the Greek restaurant -- Grecian Delight, I believe -- the second night I was in Talossa was hilarious. Gödafriëu Válcadác'h defended his multitude of Prime Dictates, only admitting his condemnation of the hot dog mascot was frivolous.

And going on the two-car tour of Talossa with "Art Verbotten" as our tour guide was funny as hell. Ben was the lead car, and his sense of sequence is faulty, it seems. After passing by the same water tower in Maritiimi-Maxhestic we had passed twice before, "Art" remarked: "Remember that thing we saw twice earlier? Yeah, well, it's till there." Or something like that.

Q: *Okay, now the dumbest. What's the most blitheringly idiotic act you can remember seeing?*

A: I think that the biggest blithering idiot in my experience would have to be something associated with Gary Cone or Mark Hamilton. I cannot specify; both provide so many wonderful things. However, I did at least one really colossally stupid thing... I lost the Talo-Penguinean Peace Treaty.

Q: *D'oh. Chris, is there anything else you'd like to say to the multitudes?*

A: I hope we can all work together, with our disparate experiences and individual talents, to build the Republic into that which it deserves to be: something magnificent in the eyes of history. And, thanks for everyone who's stuck through this interview this far down the page.

Q: *And thank you, Chris Gruber.*

Michael Pope, April 2005

Interviewer: J.K. Kelley

I didn't want to lose these friendships, to lose contact with my fellow citizens. And I was angry because I could trace all of these problems--every single one of them--to the feet of one person. Ben Madison.

Q: *Michael Pope, thanks for taking the time to talk with me. Do you prefer 'Michael' or does anyone call you 'Mike?'*

A: I always go by Michael, simply because I think the name "Mike Pope" sounds harsh and choppy. "Michael Pope" sounds nicer on the ears.

Q: *Then 'Michael' you shall remain. Where did you grow up?*

A: I am what is known as a "military brat". When I was growing up, my father was an officer in the US Marine Corps, and we moved every few years. I was born in North Carolina, and lived in Hawaii; Northern Virginia (the DC area); my family's hometown of Douglas, Arizona; Bremerton, Washington; Copenhagen, Denmark and Fallbrook, California (in north San Diego county).

Q: *All I know about your post-high school life is that you're a USC Trojan, former Marine and you work at the Pentagon in some sort of IT capacity. Can you put some meat on those bare informational bones?*

A: Sure. I attended USC right after high school, and participated in the NROTC officer-training program. I did not complete the program, but I spent a couple of years in the Marine Corps after college as an infantryman. I was in Desert Storm.

After I got out of the service, I moved to the Washington, DC area, where I had ideas of joining the US Foreign Service. Although I passed the written exam several times, I was not successful in getting past the oral exams. (Truth is, only about 1% of people applying for the Foreign Service are actually hired, so I don't feel too bad about it.)

I ended up eventually in the IT field, round about 10 years ago. Before that, I worked for a cult leader who tried to publish an exercise manual for female reproductive organs--seriously! I then worked briefly for an environmental policy think tank before getting into IT. I have worked mostly as a contractor to various government agencies. Right now, I actually work (as a contractor) for the EPA, not the Pentagon. I have also worked for the Surgeon-General's office, the National Library of Medicine, the DC power utility (Pepco), and the US Geological Survey, all as a contractor.

Q: *A cult leader? Female reproductive organs? That sounds like a pretty interesting job. Can you tell me more?*

A: Sure. I was an employee of a company handling drug treatment and AIDS prevention contracts for the DC and federal governments, and I worked directly for the president, who was a leader of a

cult called ECKANKAR. I got ensnared into a side project of his to market an exercise manual for the circumvaginal muscle--the exercises were touted to stop urinary incontinence and enhance sexual pleasure.

It was a bizarre situation, we worked long, long hours and then had a ridiculous direct marketing strategy where we got a mailing list from Prevention magazine (mainly elderly women) and from Self magazine (mainly younger women)--then proceeded to try to sell younger women on the promise of ending incontinence and sell elderly women on the promise of better sex. Leaving the company was one of the best experiences of my life!

A year later, a co-worker who left the same time I did called me to tell me to check out the business section of the Washington Post--to see that the company had filed for bankruptcy! I found out just today that my former boss recently broke with ECKANKAR and has started his own movement. Interesting...

Q: *How does someone get a job like that? I'm picturing a want ad: "ECK Master seeks articulate technical writer for manual on female reproductive apparatus. Ownership of said apparatus not necessary, but familiarity a must. Apply in person."*

A: (Laughs.) Actually, he started with his core staff--three of us who worked on grant proposals, his executive assistant and his secretary. He got three medical specialists to review the manual--one gynecologist and two "sexologists". We had about 7 or 8 desktop publishing temps to put the book together. He then decided to claim in the advertising that "17 medical experts" were involved in preparing the books. He also got ahold of a perineometer, handed it to his assistant and told her to try it out and then pass it along to his secretary. Which, if you know what a perineometer¹ is, isn't the most tasteful suggestion...

Q: (Laughs.) *No, it isn't. Later I'll ask more, but for now let's stick with this: since you use the word 'cult' to describe ECKANKAR, how would you characterize its environment from your inside view?*

A: To tell the truth, those of us working for his company didn't really have any kind of "inside view", as he didn't really proselytize. He did bring aboard some Eckists.

My use of the word "cult" is based on what I have read about the group, and doesn't refer to their teachings, but rather to what appears to be an atmosphere of fear inside the group, specifically surrounding the idea of leaving the group. Members are told that if they ever leave ECKANKAR, that they will be trapped in the lower reaches of the Astral Plane until such time as the Mahanta takes pity on them. This is actually written in their scripture, the Shariat-ki-Sugmad.

But I never attended an ECKANKAR meeting. And my use of the word "cult" isn't intended to convey images of a group of Jonestowners living on a compound--Eckists lead ordinary lives and hold ordinary jobs.

Q: *I bet there's no beer in the lower reaches of the Astral Plane as they characterize it. I gather you don't stress too much about the threatened consequences?*

A: Well, I was never an Eckist--but I did worry a bit about what happened to former staffers who left the company--most of them had problems receiving their final checks, thanks to red tape that seemed to magically crop up!

Q: *Obviously some of the on-the-job training took, since you're a family man. Tell us a bit about your Dandelions, and the lady who did the hard part of bringing them into your life.*

A: I met my wife Jane while I was still a Marine. Right before I got out, I was sent to New York City for "Fleet Week", a kind of dog-and-pony show for the civilians. Jane was a USO volunteer, and I met her at a USO sponsored party on board the USS Intrepid (a decommissioned aircraft carrier now serving as a museum). I literally saw her from across the room and had to pick my jaw up from the floor! Despite the large ratio of men to women, I managed to talk to her, and we met for a "tour of the city" before I went back home. We kept in touch, and later she moved down to DC and we were married in June of 95--so our tenth anniversary is coming up!

Jane manages a retail costume/dance shop. I am continually discovering just what an amazing person she is, and I am very thankful she is a part of my life. We have two children, 5 year old twins Geoffrey and Danielle. They are currently in kindergarten, and are very bright, happy kids. Both of them are Dandelions, as they were born after I became a Talossan citizen. They are at a great age, because they are old enough now where they have their own opinions and are very communicative.

Q: *You're rightly proud of them all. As a former NROTC midshipman, you were subject to a very exacting code of conduct. Having been through some ROTC myself, I know that leaves its mark. Do you feel that your NROTC and Marine Corps experience shaped your sense of ethics, or did it merely codify what was already ingrained?*

A: Good question. I think for the most part, it reinforced and solidified what I had already learned at home from my parents--but going through the process myself meant I actually experienced what I had theoretical knowledge of before, and so the NROTC/Marine Corps experience allowed me to "take ownership", so to speak, of the values I had already learned.

Q: *You've long been an outspoken real-life political conservative and patriot, certainly Talossa's most articulate one. Your demonstrated Talossan patriotism doesn't need an interview question; but would you also characterize yourself as a Talossan conservative?*

A: That is a very ironic question, considering I was one of the leaders of the Revolution. (Laughs.) When I was in the Kingdom, I definitely considered myself a Talossan conservative--tradition was important to me, as was the idea of sticking with the "tried and true" ways of doing things, and supporting the monarchy.

Since the Republic was formed, my views have been a little more in flux. I still find value in much of what developed naturally during the 20+ years of the Kingdom, but certain other traditional marks of Talossanity I have discarded. For example, I no longer use the term "azul", because for me the term has "Benite" connotations.

Q: *I reckoned you would enjoy that irony, but I'm going to stick with real world politics here a bit. Were you a conservative from your earliest political awareness?*

A: Yes. I took an academic interest in politics back in grade school, but started to form my views in junior high. In part, they were outgrowths of my parent's views, but I read a lot and adopted views on my own. I read Barry Goldwater's *Conscience of a Conservative* early on, and I actually took to Ronald Reagan months before my parents did. Oddly enough, another book that influenced me back in 8th grade was the campaign book by the 1980 Libertarian candidate Joe Clark.

Q: *I've known people, for example my father-in-law, who find ways to let politics actually disrupt friendships. I get the exact opposite read from you: that you don't permit this to happen, at least not from your end of a friendship. Since I have the same ethic, I'd like to know more about your own philosophy about political differences and personal friendship.*

A: I found in high school and college that many of the people I enjoyed hanging around with had very different political views from my own. I've always loved debating, and I have very often been in the minority in my political views in any given group. I've always tried to separate the personal from the political, and I don't mind a good debate when both sides keep it respectful.

Having lived thru the Clinton years, I also understand how it feels to see someone you despise win an easy re-election--so I didn't take any of the post-election anti-Bush vitriol personally. Considering that many of my wife's views are different from my own, this is, I think, a good approach to take!

Q: *Was Clinton president when you were a Marine?*

A: No--I got out in July of 1992. I remember reading about Clinton as a candidate when I was about to get out. I honestly didn't pay much attention to him, because I thought of him as a lightweight. Big mistake... *wry laugh*

Q: *Now that we know you a bit better, here's the question everyone knows is coming: how did you discover Talossa?*

A: By web surfing! I was looking around for interesting stuff, and somewhere I heard about Hutt River Province in Australia. Through a websearch, I found Ben Madison's "Micronations Page"--a long list of various serious, semi-serious and hobby micronations. This page has long since been removed from the Internet, by the way. I had recently read an article in the "Washington Post" about a town in Maryland that seceded from the US while their bridge was being repaired--the Maryland legislature voted to recognize the secession and then to readmit them when the repairs were complete. I sent this clipping along to the proprietor of the Micronations Page, and commented "Talossa looks like fun."

Ben Madison wrote back and started a cordial conversation, and basically invited me to join. I looked over the Witt and decided it looked like fun, and went ahead and applied. Ián Metairia asked me some questions, in his capacity as a Cort Justice, and I started up a good conversation with him as well. And when Chris Gruber became PM, he sent a nice reply to my email of congratulations.

Q: *So Ben Madison was your earliest Talossan friend, and the proximate reason you signed up?*

A: Pretty much, yeah. Of course, I had no idea that I would get as involved as I did.

Q: *When exactly were you naturalized as a citizen of the Kingdom of Talossa?*

A: 1998, shortly after Grubi became PM - probably April.

Q: *Give us the Talossan political backdrop of those times. Was there any controversy going on?*

A: Oh, yeah. Dan Wardlow had just left Talossa (and the PM-ship). There was an election just before I joined, this was when the Peace and Freedom Party attempted to unify the opposition, but lost to the PC juggernaut. And Penguinia was a sore point for Ben--he actually warned me about them in our early email conversations.

Q: *So you knew of the Penguinians only by reputation, and what you heard was bad?*

A: Yes. They were, according to what I heard, a group of hate-filled ex-Talossans who were harassing prospective citizens like myself.

Q: *Did you suspect at all that this was pre-emptory indoctrination?*

A: I was probably a little skeptical at first, but I followed the debates on Wittenberg, and Ben seemed very reasonable and persuasive. And my other contacts (Ián M/Grubi) had nothing good to say about Wardlow or the Penguinians, either. And it certainly appeared at the time that the PC had massive popular support, since I didn't know about the pocket votes yet. So any suspicions I had were drowned out, sadly.

Q: *I can't resist. Let's imagine that you, for whatever reason, had a psychic reading in May 1998. And the psychic told you that within seven years, Ben would be calling you a neo-Penguinian, and you'd be working closely with its people to form an anti-monarchist Talossa. Tell me how you might have reacted.*

A: Ha! Well, I would probably would not have believed it, taking the stance "there's no mystic energy field controlling my destiny". On the other hand, I could well have been scared away from Talossa altogether!

Q: *Besides the obvious inducement implicit in the party's name, what motivated you to join the Progressive Conservative Party?*

A: Everyone I got to know during my prospectivehood was in the PC. Also, I thought the PC clearly out-argued the PFP during the election campaign. This was, I realized later, because the PFP members were waylaid by Dan Wardlow's renunciation, and were reacting somewhat defensively. But the arguments made by the PC at the time were more appealing to me.

Q: *Did you guys ever realize that the full acronym for that was 'PCP?'*

A: I hadn't heard that, no... (Laughs.)

Q: *Like Chris Gruber, wasn't it a relatively short time before they offered you the top job?*

A: Not really, because Chris was in office for about a year or so. However, it was a relatively short time (a week or two) before Chris offered me the Deputy PMship, which was the second top-most job.

Q: *I believe you were the longest serving PM in Talossan history. How do you characterize your administration in hindsight?*

A: It was successful in many ways, especially if you look at it in purely political terms. However, I think the mass renunciation of the Liberals showed that the political "triumphs" were very costly, both to my own sense of right and wrong and to the country as a whole.

Q: *You were a longtime political ally of Ben Madison. What was your political relationship like at first?*

A: At first, I was a big defender of Ben. This served to get me noticed early on, I think. Later, we clashed on issues of US politics, but I kept that compartmentalized from Talossan affairs.

I realized I had "arrived" within the PC when Ben asked me to mediate in a dispute between him and Ián M. in the PC leadership. Ben was threatening to leave the PC. Ultimately I played no role in the reconciliation between them, which was effected by a face-to-face meeting at the local Greek eatery, but I was impressed that I had been asked to mediate.

Q: *Maybe the gods of the eatery watched over you. What was the first major external flap or issue the Kingdom faced on your watch?*

A: External issue? Not sure--by the time I became PM, external ties were almost nonexistent. Actually, as Grubi's deputy, I had initiated a negotiation phase with Penguinia, under the terms of the treaty, but that came to nothing, mainly because we never got our act together on this end.

One internal flap with external implications was my selection of Ián Anglatzarâ as Minister for Micronational Affairs. That was also my first big Talossan disagreement with Ben, who hated the idea of Ián being in a position to deal with "bug nations". My reasoning for the appointment was twofold - because Ián wanted the job (always important when the government is run by volunteers), but also to give the Liberal Party a stake in the government. I didn't want them to be completely marginalized, because I didn't see that anything good would come from that.

Q: *So you were trying to pitch a broader tent, but Ben already had a vendetta against Ián?*

A: Yes. One that at the time I never understood. Ben would rail about how hateful and vindictive Ián was, but my interaction with Ián was exactly the opposite. Eventually, I decided that since we had a policy of "no micronational diplomacy", I would replace the position of Minister of Micronational Affairs with a webpage saying "thanks for your inquiry, but no thanks." By this time, if I recall correctly, Ián had already quit the cabinet, but I thanked him publicly for his dedicated service. I wasn't going to not do that just because Ben hated him.

Q: *Do you think that put a permanent question in Ben's mind about your unswerving loyalty to all*

matters Madison?

A: Perhaps. At the time, Ben and I were also arguing about the Clinton impeachment, and when he wrote about me in Støtanneu or on the PM Page, he tended to bring this up in a fashion that was humorous to him, but slightly nasty towards me. That annoyed me a little bit, because I felt he wasn't reciprocating the "separation of real-world/Talossan politics" rule that I was trying to follow.

Q: *Were you around when Matt Dabrowski made his bid for Kingdom citizenship?*

A: Yes. I was very skeptical at first of Dabrowski, and a little offended when he started picking fights with the people who would vote on his citizenship. I later felt he had straightened up a bit, and really felt bad when he was rejected in his bid for citizenship. I actually sent him an email to buck up his spirits after that defeat. Later, when he came back for a second try, he asked me to support him, and I did.

Once Dabrowski was in, of course, he started attacking Gruber as PM--in fact, he was the proximate cause, I think, in Gruber's resignation. I saw his energy, and offered him a cabinet post. Again, I had ulterior and multiple motives for this--I wanted to harness his energy, but I also wanted him to have a stake in my success (so he wouldn't rock the boat), and finally, I wanted to get him all tied up with revamping the legal code so he wouldn't be able to cause any mischief.

Q: *I once heard Dabrowski characterized as the only person who ever really wanted into Talossa but was rejected (before myself, of course)². Did the Dabrowski Affair change the political climate of the Regipats?*

A: I don't really think so, the atmosphere was already very charged. Ben was the single biggest supporter of Matt, and I think some of the opposition were very opposed to him, but it already an acrimonious relationship.

Q: *You were PM during my own brief and rather acrimonious prospectivehood in the Kingdom. Is it safe to assume I got chewed up pretty well in private PC counsels?*

A: Yes and no. I remember Ben was very much against you, and he worked very hard trying to get support for this. I don't recall anyone else taking such an intense dislike to you. Speaking personally, I remember that I thought Ben's attacks on your religious beliefs were a cheap shot, below-the-belt. I sincerely regret that I didn't call him on it. But later, when you came back to try the second time, I accepted Ben's reasoning that something you said--where you mentioned "true Talossans" in an apparent reference to opposition members, showed that you'd be a poor fit.

Q: *This interview is supposed to be me mining you for revelations, not revealing my own, but I'd like your reaction to just such a case. In private, Ián A. told me during those times that the best way for me to have a hope was to shun the TLP, hint that if I was let in I would join the PC, and try to stay out of arguments with Ben. Do you think that would have worked?*

A: Not really. Ián's instincts were right, but I think Ben already had you on his bad list, and I don't think he would have relented for any reason without the passage of some time.

Q: *Do you think Ben was desperate to keep me out?*

A: Yes, as I recall he was pretty frantic about trying to convince everyone that you were a dangerous nutjob. And he was all the more frantic because people weren't really buying into that idea.

Q: *To what lengths did he go, to your knowledge? I've always suspected he spent that whole month on the phone and composing e-mails, pleading, cajoling, browbeating and threatening.*

A: He may well have spent time on the phone. I remember he spent a lot of time sending pleading, cajoling and threatening emails to the PC members.

As an aside, I seem to recall that this was around about the same time that he was indulging in a particularly vicious religious argument with Phil Ledgerwood. Vicious from Ben's side, that is--I remember post titles like "God Hates You, Says Phil" (not an exact quote). I wonder now if he was on a roll, triumphantly blasting everyone else's False Religions.

Q: *A topic which will come as soon as I complete this rather self-indulgent line of questioning. Do not bind the mouths of the kine that tread the grain, and all that. (Laughs.) If I remember right, you abstained on my citizenship bid. Did you take any heat for not voting Contra?*

A: I think Ben sent me an email expressing his disappointment that I hadn't voted against you. By that time, though, I had been dealing with Ben as PM for a couple of years, and didn't have any qualms about crossing him on votes.

If you recall, I mentioned that Ben had brought up a quote from a post you made when you returned, where you used the phrase "true Talossans" who you said, I believe, would support you. Ben used that line to argue that you were divisive and a bad fit for Talossa. This was his after he had mainly failed to paint you as a religious whack-o and bigot. I partially bought into the idea that you were divisive, I admit. But by that time I was pretty fed up with Ben's constant attacks, so I was pretty determined not to vote Contra.

Q: *To me, it seemed like Ben had—he'll love this terminology—cast a sort of spell over the Talossan population. Any comment on this characterization, from someone who by his own admission used to work for a cult leader?*

A: Ben sort of wore people down until they voted his way. I don't think anyone really bought his line about you being a nut--except perhaps some of the offline folks who only got their information from Ben. But he did wear people down to vote his way.

I often thought of Ben as having some of the characteristics of a cult leader. I just always thought of him as a fairly inept one, because there was always a fairly large number of people publicly opposed to him at any given time. But he had some of the traits: a tendency to view his opinions as Absolute Truth, an intolerance toward opposing views, a habit of trying to isolate Talossans from outside influences (especially ex-citizens), a sophistic ability to bend the truth into reasonable-sounding lies, and a tendency to try to use fear to keep people in line.

Q: *Phil Ledgerwood was a pleasant, creative, popular fellow. Why did he leave the Kingdom?*

A: I have no idea why, exactly, he left. I was pretty good friends with him and often emailed him, and he never told me why. I have always speculated that it was because he just got fed up with Ben constantly attacking his religious beliefs, and decided life was too short to deal with such a person. But that's just a guess on my part.

Q: *I remember the TLP as your PC's most credible political opposition in those days. Do you think they could have gained a share in government had they played their cards better?*

A: Perhaps. It would have been difficult, given the way Ben felt about them. I would have preferred for them to have been involved. As I said earlier, one reason I wanted Ián A. in my Cabinet was to give the Liberals a stake in the Government. I was disappointed when they bloc-voted "No" on the Vote of Confidence even as a fellow party member was in the Cabinet, and that may have soured me on working with them. Jay Shorten, who served as Opposition Leader for awhile, was also sometimes, in my opinion, needlessly combative. Which, of course, was the job description of Opposition Leader, so I don't fault him on that.

Later on, the Liberals mainly slid into political inactivity. They renounced their seats in the Cosâ as a bloc, I recall, and after that things seemed to quiet down a bit. My thinking was "great, there isn't as much fighting anymore". But this was deceptive. I thought that since the Liberals stopped fighting so much with the PC, things were getting better. In fact, I think the Liberals were withdrawing themselves emotionally from Talossa itself, a natural reaction since they had been scapegoats for so long.

If I had known how they really felt before their mass citizenship renunciation, I would have tried to do something about it. I am not at all sure what I could have done about it, though--it may have been too late. I would have put a Liberal in my Cabinet again in a heartbeat, without worrying about Ben's reaction--but Ben would have reacted, and his reaction would have been loud and vociferous--and would probably have accelerated their desire to get away from Talossa and Ben.

Q: *Did you have any idea what Ben would use for a punching bag once he'd finished gloating and excoriating over the TLP exit?*

A: No. I knew that wasn't the end of it. We no longer had Penguinia to kick around, we no longer had any dealings with so-called "bug nations", and the main opposition party was gone. I guess I assumed the RCT would eventually be next, but I knew the relative peace wouldn't last long.

Q: *You gave way as PM to Gödafrieu Válcadác'h, also of the PC. How'd that come about?*

A: By this time, I had been PM for a long time, longer than anyone in previous Talossan history. I had in fact discussed stepping down some time prior with the PC, and had agreed to stay on for another term so we could figure out who my successor would be. I finally called Ben one evening and told him I was ready to go. He brought up Gödafrieu Válcadác'h's name as a potential successor.

I had thought of Gödafrieu myself--I thought he was capable of it, and I liked him. But Ben was the first one to mention it. This is significant, because on Ben's "PM Page", he calls Gödafrieu "Pope's hand-picked successor". That isn't true - Ben was the one who brought up his name.

Anyway, I emailed Gödafriëu, asked him how he felt about the idea, and then we talked by phone. I don't think he was expecting it, but he was definitely interested in the job. I named him Deputy PM, and then we arranged for the transfer of power to take place during Talossafest, when Gödafriëu was on Talossan soil.

Q: *On that same page, I believe, Ben debilitates your legacy--the opposite of 'rehabilitates'. Once you were illustrious, now you are a sad descent into wrongness. This is your chance to reply to that.*

A: Ben's section on me is kind of ridiculous. In the same paragraph, he criticizes me for cementing one-party dominance and for bringing opposition members into my cabinet. How can anyone take that seriously?

Q: *Can you answer the question you just posed? Speculate, at the least?*

A: Hmm... Well, anyone who was actually there will already have an opinion of my conduct in office, and I don't expect they would be swayed by Ben's rewrite. Most of the current active population of the Kingdom, though, weren't there--and they might be more amenable to accepting Ben's version of events. But still, if anyone really thinks about it, the contradictions are obvious. And, if you think about it, perhaps that clumsily-written paragraph with the obvious contradictions might in fact spur a new Kingdomite to question Ben's account of my term--and then to start questioning other things Ben has written?

Q: *Do you think the decreased number of eyewitnesses correlates to Ben's tendency to change his version of history?*

A: That's a good point. I don't think Ben could get away with blatantly rewriting the past if there were more active Kingdomites who remember that time. However, I wouldn't say that Ben routinely rewrites history. In my experience, he writes things once, his way, in Ar Pats. It's not the truth, it's Ben's caricature of the truth, but I don't recall these sorts of changes before the Republic was formed. Going back and changing legacies, rewriting good guys into heels, this is a new tactic, and, I think, a somewhat desperate one.

Q: *When did you first start to see yourself diverging from Ben Madison politically, and why?*

A: Almost from the start I was at loggerheads with Ben over US politics. The Clinton impeachment, the 2000 Republican primaries (Bush vs McCain), Elian Gonzalez, Gore v. Bush. We were constantly arguing. For the most part, we were allies on Talossan politics, though.

I think the first divergence was when I was serving as Immigration Minister after Gödafriëu became PM. Ben started to attack me for not being more active in the job. I was a little offended by that. Especially since I didn't think Ben had been very generous with me after I stepped down from the PM'ship. He mentioned a knighthood to me one time--when he visited DC on his honeymoon and brought me the National Archives. He never mentioned it again. I'm not saying I deserved a knighthood, but some official recognition for having served as PM for so long would have been nice.

Q: *Had you in fact been slacking off at all as IM, and if so, why?*

A: My company lost the contract I was on at that time, and I was busy trying to find a new job for a couple of months. So, yes, I was not as active in the job as I could have been. But Ben claimed to have sent test emails to my Immigration account to see if I was responding and there were no such test messages.

Q: *This may be getting a bit ahead, but what was the point of no return for you and Ben?*

A: The point of no return was when he sacked Gödafrieu and installed Maxime Charbonneau as PM. I saw this as an illegal coup d'etat, and I asked the PC and Grey Congress Party to elect me Opposition Leader, because I was ready to fight.

Q: *I'm feeling uncommonly journalistic today. I have this irresistible urge to focus on sleaze rather than substance, so I'd best get it out of my system. Think back as best you can, and tell me: is there any one hidden fact from your days of political alliance with Ben—or your falling out—that hardly anyone now knows, and that Ben wishes it would stay that way? A 'dirtiest secret,' as it were?*

A: That's a good question... I don't know. I don't think I ever told anyone about how I felt slighted by Ben after stepping down as PM. Does that qualify?

Q: *Any recollection you might have qualifies. My thinking is that there was much private PC discussion, proposed actions, arguments. I'm curious about the side of Ben you had access to, the side most others could not see.*

A: Ben is a pretty transparent individual. The public Ben is pretty similar to the private Ben--friendly in person, but a bully behind the keyboard. I don't think he really believes his own rhetoric, but he does try to convince himself, I think. But what he said in public isn't that different from what he said in private.

I will say one thing, though. When I was the National Archivist, no matter how vitriolic he got towards other people, he always seemed to be pulling his punches with me. The reason why is obvious. However, since then, and since I returned the archives to him, he hasn't made me out to be the villain that Grubi, Marti-Pair and Gödafrieu Válcadác'h are.

In fact, at one point he told the Kingdomites that Maxime had reported to him that the Republic was split into two factions, the radical followers of Gruber, and the moderate followers of Pope. We know that isn't true, but it almost seems to me like he was trying to go easy on me in the hopes that he could lure me (and presumably my vast legion of followers) back into the Kingdom.

Q: *He describes the return of the Archives like he was half surprised you sent them back. Do you read it that way, and if so, does that offend you?*

A: I don't read it that way. What I do see is that he tries to use the fact that I sent them back as a way to score political points. I sent them back, he says, because in my heart of hearts, I know that we are wrong and he is right, and that the Kingdom is the true Talossa.

In fact, I sent them back simply because it was his property--he saved up all that stuff over the years. A lot of it was useless crap, like brochures from Sweden, doodles he made in junior high school, and homemade scripts for episodes of Electro-Woman and Dyna-Girl. Regardless, these accumulated documents were very important to him. Keeping them from him would have been a pretty cruel thing to do. And that has nothing to do with politics.

Of course, one main reason I sent them back is because he was talking about driving to my house to pick them up. The prospect of finding Ben camped out on my front porch was not a pleasant one, and he does know where I live! (Laughs.)

Q: *(Laughs.) Good thing he isn't 'violent and dangerous.'*

A: That reminds me of Ollie North's answer to a Senate committee about Abu Nidal. If Ben were violent and dangerous, I wouldn't care so much, after all I used to be a Marine infantryman. But I do have my wife and kids to worry about. (Laughs.)

Q: *When the Grey Congress (GCP) and Black Hand (MN) broke away from the PC in the span of two days, the Kingdom's longtime political status quo was demolished. Tell us about the PC's reaction as you recall it.*

A: The Grey Congress left on good terms. We all wished them well. In fact, Ián M. had brought up the idea of dissolving the pot-pie blob because of real-world political differences between the conservatives and the liberals within the PC, so it wasn't exactly a new idea. But we all thought the GCP would be a potential ally.

The Black Hand departure was a little less cordial. Still, we thought they were another potential ally, and Ben claimed that his vision for the party was of a hyper-patriotic splinter group. It was only sometime later when it developed into a mass movement.

Q: *As Opposition Leader, what did you hope to accomplish?*

A: Frankly, I hoped to drive Maxime out of office. I saw him being there as an insult to democratic self-government.

Q: *Why did you see him that way?*

A: The election was over. Gödafriëu was pretty much affirmed as PM. The proper way for Ben to have removed him would have been to arrange for him to lose the Vote of Confidence. Instead, he was summarily fired and replaced with Maxime. Many of us were of the opinion that this was in fact illegal. It was certainly unethical, in my view.

Q: *Trick or treat! Please tell us about the highlights of the Halloween Crisis as you recall it.*

A: The roots of the controversy were in Gödafriëu Válcadác'h's relative slowness in naming a Cabinet and choosing a DPM, who would have been his presumed successor, given his announced intent to retire. Gödafriëu has always taken upon himself most of the blame for this, but what I saw was Ben childishly demanding instant responses. Some of us do have a life outside of Talossa, you

know. (Laughs.)

Ben organized a Joint Statement with the Grey Congress, which would have denounced the PC for stonewalling. When we got wind of this, we contacted Gruber to give him our side of the story. Gruber decided not to go along with the Joint Statement, which left the Black Hand issuing a "joint statement" on its own.

To my mind, that one incident is what irrevocably earned Gruber the enmity of Ben. Months later, after accusing Gruber of being a violent criminal, Ben offered to make peace as long as Gruber admitted he was wrong about the Joint Statement, so I think I am right about this point. According to Ben, the Black Hand regarded firing Gödafriëu and replacing him with Maxime as a "nuclear option." Ben later published his party's internal correspondence as though it were the definitive accounting of the entire crisis, and it does appear they all agreed the other parties would "go ballistic". They did it anyway.

As Opposition Leader, the first thing I tried to do was to undermine Maxime's legitimacy as PM. This wasn't too hard to do, as his response to the criticism was to drop out of sight. That allowed me the irony of using his favorite criticism of the PC, "do-nothings", against him. Ben stepped in to assure us all that Maxime and the Black Hand were working behind the scenes to enact an agenda--which of course allowed me to charge they were conspiring in smoke-filled rooms rather than living up to their own campaign promises of open government. Then came the Royal Renunciation--when Ben Madison himself quit Talossa.

Q: *Or pretended to.*

A: Right. This was a major crisis--and the PM's response was to blame the PC and then fall silent. It was left to me, as Opposition Leader, to publicly rally the citizenry to deal with the loss of the Head of State, although I was pretty sure Ben would be back before the deadline. As the day went on, however, I remember growing more and more optimistic about the future of a Ben-less Talossa. When he actually did come back, my heart sank, and I'm sure a lot of other people had the same reaction.

Eventually, Ben approached us for negotiation. He met with Ián M. for the famous "Noodle Summit", and made a series of promises--including one to stay out of partisan politics in the future. Maxime was removed as PM, and Gödafriëu was returned to office. Quedeir Castiglia became his Deputy, and he was an acceptable choice to the other coalition parties (where Maxime had been someone who was unanimously opposed by the PC and Grey Congress from the beginning.) The Noodle Summit, and the return to the "status quo ante" was pretty much the end of the Halloween Crisis.

Q: *A host of questions. Let's see: so do you think the appointment of Maxime was basically a gratuitous slap in the Oppositional face?*

A: Yes. Ben had proposed Maxime, to universal opposition from the PC and Grey Congress--who, at the time, were coalition partners rather than the Opposition. So, to my mind, appointing Maxime was a deliberate provocation.

Q: *And there's no doubt in your mind that Ben's renunciation was a cheap stunt?*

A: None whatsoever. Although I think he also had an ulterior motive - to see how people responded to it. To see who would try to urge him to stay and who wouldn't.

Q: *So it was a loyalty test of sorts?*

A: That would be a good way to put it. Although it was also a cheap and dramatic political stunt.

Q: *Your statement that you were disappointed to see him back speaks volumes. Let's play Harry Turtledove. What might have been?*

A: We would have had to resolve some issues about the Head of State. There was no Regent, so we would have had to figure something out. That would have been difficult, given that the Black Hand still controlled the Government, but they wouldn't have lasted long in the face of the universal opposition of the Opposition--and no Ben to rally the pocket voters and give them the illusion of speaking for the majority.

The end result would have been something similar to the Republic, only more "traditional". There is one important respect in which it would have been different, though.

Q: *Then you must tell us!*

A: Without going through the crucible of the following 6 months, I doubt we would have been as open to change as the Republic is--and I doubt we would have been as open to the return of the Talossan Diaspora.

Q: *What was the aspect of the Crisis most destructive to Talossan harmony?*

A: The in-your-face aspect of the Charbonneau appointment. Before that, the three major parties were coalition partners. After the Black Hand broke and appointed Maxime, we had become enemies.

Q: *Please try and speculate a bit. Would you have been as strongly opposed to Max in less turbulent times?*

A: Probably, yes. I saw Max as someone who would not make a good PM, because he was a gadfly rather than a team player. He had a habit of alienating people instead of working with them, and instead of trying to find common ground, he had a record of finger-pointing. However, had Max legitimately won the office of PM, I would have tried to work with him as Opposition Leader. Of course, had he legitimately won office, I would probably not have been riled up enough to seek the Opposition Leader position.

Q: *What was your greatest personal ethical dilemma as a citizen of the Kingdom?*

A: I think that would be my reaction to the way the Liberals were treated by Ben. I mentioned earlier that I probably would not have been able to do anything to help the Liberals at the late stage,

just before their renunciation--but I think I could have, and should have, stood up for them more earlier on.

For example, when Ián A. was my Minister for Micronational Affairs, Ben attacked him constantly, claiming he was vicious and vindictive. I knew that was pure bunk from my own interactions with Ián. Eventually he quit the cabinet, and the SoS job, in what I can only imagine was frustration at having to deal with Ben's attacks.

I don't know what I could have done to stop Ben. But for the sake of my own sense of right and wrong, I wish I had stood up and said "this is bull, and I will no longer tolerate it."

Q: *There is something very Talossan about a situation where you find yourself wishing you had stuck up for a group of Liberals.*

A: It is ironic, because on just about every aspect of policy, I had legitimate disagreements with them. I would never have voted for them, or supported most of their agenda. But they were not the divisive people Ben made them out to be. They were not the problem--my own political ally, Ben, was the problem.

Q: *Ben tried to paint Chris as a wife-beating, violent felon. Share with us, if you will, the thoughts that went through your mind as the smear campaign unfolded.*

A: I couldn't believe that Ben was seriously forwarding this argument. The whole thing was ludicrous, and it was very difficult for me to grasp that he seriously expected people to believe him.

I remember one exchange in particular. One of the first times Ben called Chris a "violent felon", I challenged him. Ben's response was "You don't believe me? Why?" I was dumbfounded, because Ben had leveled his charge without giving any supporting evidence, and he apparently expected me to believe him, just because he said so!

Q: *You weren't being a good follower.*

A: No, I guess I wasn't! (Laughs.)

Q: *So would it be safe to say that Ben's credibility with you took a major drop as a result?*

A: I basically found it impossible from that point on to believe a word he said. I lost all respect for him as a person, as well.

Q: *Is that when you began to sympathize with Chris, or did that start at a different time?*

A: I started sympathizing with Chris back during the Halloween Crisis--which was the root of the Ben-Grubi Feud, but which did in fact predate it.

During the Halloween Crisis, Ben was working hard to try to force Gruber out, and Chris felt

isolated. At the time, we had a joint PC-GCP mailing list, and I remember Gruber--and Lisa--complaining about him being hung out to dry. I think he thought that the PC might reach an accord with the MN and then basically abandon him. I remember promising him that I would not let that happen.

Q: *Your ringside seat for the Ben-Chris feud is a historical diamond mine. At what stage, in your view, did that feud go beyond all possible reconciliation?*

A: When Ben charged Chris with being a violent criminal, and revealed he had been investigating Chris' background. At that point, it was no longer a Talossan feud, but something with potentially terrible real-world consequences. At one point, Ben promised, on Wittenberg, to try to intervene to screw up Gruber's child custody hearing. That is unforgivable.

Q: *When Ben lost his suit against M-P over the election rules, with Chris as counsel, what did your PC make of the suit and its result?*

A: The PC backed M-P and his rules, so we were very pleased. The rules were put into place to ensure that Ben would have a difficult time stuffing the ballot box, which we all thought was the only possible way to defeat the Black Hand at the election.

Q: *Let's talk about pocket votes. Do you think Ben actually contacted all his offline voters at all times, or do you think he just decided how they were voting?*

A: I am convinced that he did not actually contact them all. The reason I think this is because the PC, and the other parties, tried to contact the same voters, and were often unable to do so.

What I think normally happened was that Ben would go all out to try to contact everyone and tell them his side of the story, and secure their vote for the party of his choice. I believe, though, that when he was unable to reach someone, that he would simply cast a vote in their name. I also think that he would cast votes in his father's and sister's name, without actually bothering to tell them an election was going on. He admitted publicly that he used to cast his father's votes in the Senate, which shows a pattern of behavior, a *modus operandi*.

Q: *Besides that admission, what other evidence supports your view here?*

A: The fact that no one else could reach some of these pocket voters was telling. Another red flag was Ben's reaction to the rule changes. If he hadn't been casting fraudulent votes in the first place, why expend so much energy fighting against making fraudulent votes impossible?

Of course, what we are dealing with is a "preponderance of evidence", not "beyond a reasonable doubt." Part of the problem is that Ben was always Deputy Secretary of State, and the routine during each election was for Ben to simply announce "I got in touch with so-and-so, and he has cast his votes for the MN!" Or for the PC, back when Ben was in the PC. And that, too, was another ethical dilemma. When I first became PM, I believed that the pocket voters really did support the PC, but as time went on, I knew better.

Q: *Not quite done with that issue, but have to choose which deeply pertinent question to ask first, so it's this one. He really peed his pants when M-P sacked him as Deputy SoS. What'd you think of that?*

A: Well, first of all, I was pleased. But I expected him to fight hard against that. As Deputy SoS, he was in the perfect position to stuff the ballot box with fraudulent pocket votes, and as an election official, who could question him? After he was sacked, he had no way to directly influence the voting process. Since I was convinced he was engaged in casting fraudulent votes, I expected him to react strongly to being fired. He lived up to my expectations.

Q: *As you stated, your PC did benefit from those pocket votes for some time with you at the helm. Can you recall when you began to question them privately, and why you didn't make an issue of it?*

A: About midway through my term, I basically knew that all of these long-lost PC supporters didn't have a clue as to what was going on in the Kingdom, that they were either voting the way Ben told them to, or not voting at all. As to why I didn't make an issue of it... that's a harder question.

I think that during my time in office, the PC party had a lot of support. My place in office was not dependent on pocket votes. Also, I did believe that every Talossan had the right to vote, no matter how ill-informed their votes were. So, as I saw it, only a small number of potentially fraudulent votes were involved each time. I guess I didn't want to rock the boat, or to have scandal taint my tenure.

Q: *Okay. As I lack your firsthand experiences, I sense there may be something else you have to say about the whole degeneration of the Kingdom's unity up to the point of the Republic's planning stages—something I haven't thought to ask. I want to give you a chance to unload. Please comment on any event that I haven't covered, and tell whatever stories you feel deserve a good telling.*

A: OK. As the time went on last spring, and the Ben-Grubi Feud escalated, many people were completely fed up. There was a kind of despair--that isn't necessarily the right word, but it's as close as I can get. Especially when Cooper and Art Verbotten renounced. At this point, I personally felt a mix of emotions. I was upset that good people were leaving, and I felt that I might have to eventually do the same. And I was angry.

I was angry because these people were my friends, and this thing we had going--Talossa--was something that we could no longer enjoy. I was angry because Talossa had been a large part of my life for years, and it was fast becoming an intolerable place to be. I didn't want to lose these friendships, to lose contact with my fellow citizens. And I was angry because I could trace all of these problems--every single one of them--to the feet of one person. Ben Madison.

That was when I made the critical change in my mind, to seriously consider secession. I had not been in favor of the idea before, but after this period of soul-searching, I saw it was the only solution. I suspect that others of us went through the exact same process. And that idea, that knowledge that we were about to secede, gave us all the strength to stick it out until the big day.

Q: *Would it be fair to call you the leader of the alienated Talossans in the last days of union?*

A: I don't think so. I was a leader, but not the leader. In fact, for awhile I was less active than many others. The way I came to the forefront was, I think, proposing the Compact.

Our joint PC-GCP mailing list had been busy for a couple of weeks debating what would happen--what kind of government structure we would set up, how we would organize things, etc. One evening while driving home from work it occurred to me that we were never going to get anywhere if we spent all our time debating.

That night, I wrote "The Compact". This was a statement of intent, a pledge that we were all going to join together in seceding from the Kingdom, and a pledge that we would work out all of the details later. I sent this around, and asked people to sign it. I think this made it real. By signing it, people were committing themselves to this course of action. We were also joining each other in committing high treason.

Q: *And making the most of it, as the quote goes.*

A: Again, this made it real--as Ben Franklin said, "We must assuredly all hang together, or else we shall all hang separately." That quote stuck out in my mind. Once the Compact was signed, we set the date and started organizing the actual secession. Gödalfriðu Válcadác'h wrote the provisional constitution and circulated it. And when the time came to select our first Dean, I was very surprised to be unanimously elected.

Q: *Now we go to an area of pure historical preservation. The whole evening in which you authored the Compact is of paramount importance, and any detail is of value. Please search your memory and tell us everything: your mood as you wrote, whether you were interrupted, any major changes you made in the process, even whatever beverage you had while working. Nothing is too small.*

A: Hmm... that's a tall order! Well, I was in a good mood - hopeful, and I felt "empowered" because I was doing something that could get this whole revolution started. I worked on it at home, and pretty much had it in one draft. I was thinking about the Declaration of Independence as I wrote it, although I didn't actually model the text on it.

A lot of the mood of the immediate pre-revolution period and early days of the Republic was actually influenced by a film, the musical film "1776". As it happens, both Gruber and myself love that film, and dialogue from the film influenced my idea of writing the Compact in the first place. As the planning days went on, Gruber and I used to trade movie quotations back and forth on the secessionist mailing list. (Laughs.)

Q: *Was there any dissension in the ranks of the dissenters, so to speak?*

A: Not really, nothing major. We committed to form a new nation together. We debated whether to call it Talossa or not, and we had good arguments both ways, but we voted, and the Republic of Talossa it was. I was one of those, in fact, who voted to use a different name, but I was outvoted, and I accepted the outcome cheerfully--in fact, I argued the rightness of naming ourselves Talossa later on with two Kingdomites who were tasked to try to "negotiate" with us after the secession.

Q: *Trust me when I say that will shortly be a topic for much more detail. But for now: what sort of a consensus process did you employ while making plans for secession?*

A: We voted. And everyone agreed in advance to accept the outcome of the votes.

Q: *June 1, 2004 was our Lexington and Concord and our Yorktown rolled into one. Give us an insight into your state of mind as you prepared to post the Proclamation.*

A: There was a palpable feeling of excitement. There was also a feeling of solemnity. We were about to cross the Rubicon, and there would be no turning back. We emailed each other that morning to finalize the details. Just before noon, I sent out what I thought would be the final pre-revolutionary email. It said "See you all on the other side." Turned out I was an hour early, because I forgot that the revolution was set for noon, Talossan Standard Time. But you get the picture.

Q: *Was Ben's being out of town a coincidence, or was there a specific reason why the Proclamation was timed as it was?*

A: The date was planned independently of Ben's itinerary, I think--but we agreed that Ben being away would give us the breathing room we needed to get established. We thought that his inability to react immediately would be very helpful. In retrospect, I don't think it would have made a difference, really, because once we seceded, Ben was no longer an issue.

Q: *As the first Dean of the Provisional Governing Council, in a way you're also the Republic's George Washington. What were your immediate priorities as Dean?*

A: First of all, we needed to establish the way we would make our decisions. Secondly, we had to deal, immediately, with the subjects of the Kingdom. We wanted to encourage anyone else who wanted to leave to join us. I was contacted right away by Ronalt Rosais who, along with Marc Moisan, were tasked by Mark Hamilton and Quedeir Castiglia to try to "negotiate" with us.

We had to decide how to deal with people who were friendly to us, but who did not want to leave the Kingdom. We had to deal with attracting back some of the ex-Talossans who had left--we wanted to get the Liberals back, for example. And we also had to figure out how to deal with an issue no-one thought of beforehand--how we would deal with traditional "enemies of Talossa" who showed up to express interest in joining us.

Q: *I resemble that remark. So tell us more about the negotiations: the approach, proposals, the tone, the result.*

A: Let's see... Ronalt contacted me first, to ask why we left and what could be done to bring us back. He later got approval from the Kingdom's PM, Q, and the Regent, Mark Hamilton, to carry on negotiations. His tone was more or less "you guys have real grievances, what can we do to bring you back."

Marc Moisan was also "commissioned" to negotiate. His approach was perhaps the worst example of diplomacy I have ever seen. He basically said "If you come back now, we won't press charges." I still have the correspondence, and if there is any interest among the Talossan populace, I'll release it--it was all in the public domain, and my responses show the thinking that was behind the

revolution.

Q: *Why didn't Ronalt's approach get anywhere?*

A: It was too little, too late. None of us were interested in rejoining any entity that had Ben Madison as a member. Also, Ronalt was trying to assure us that they could arrange it so that we would face no repercussions. That was a promise he could not keep, because Ben would have attacked us constantly had we returned.

Part of my response to Ronalt pointed out that Ben had systematically violated every promise he made at the "Noodle Summit", and that even if the Black Hand Government could get him to promise "amnesty", he would never deliver on it. I also pointed out that Ben would probably not be happy to find out that the whole "traitor's gang" left, only to be brought back in by his faithful followers. (Laughs.)

Q: *So the plenipotentiary approach, if you will, ended up an impotentiary one. Ben was the dealbreaker.*

A: Yes, Ben was the dealbreaker. One thing that we found in the first few days after the secession was a very intense feeling of liberation, of finally being freed from having to deal with Ben Madison and his petty hatreds. None of us were willing to go back into that situation.

Q: *Thus, no offer that included a future with Ben in the same country was going to gain even minor support in your counsels?*

A: Right. We did have a counter-offer, though, which was "if you are also fed up with Ben, than leave the Kingdom and join us." Our provisional constitution guaranteed instant citizenship to any Kingdomite who renounced his allegiance to the Kingdom and applied for citizenship with the Republic. With three exceptions.

Q: *Which look to dwindle to two soon. Now let's talk about the Moisan approach. Would you characterize it as high-handed?*

A: Yes. It was very arrogant and heavy-handed. Moisan blew his cover when, on the second email, he told me that he didn't believe for a minute that we really had a beef with Ben, but that we were simply mad that we lost the election. So not only did he make us an unattractive offer, he summarily rejected any notion that our stated reasons for leaving were worthy of consideration. It was like he deliberately baited his fly-trap with vinegar.

Q: *How did you respond?*

A: I told him that our stated reasons for leaving were our real reasons for leaving, told him he would never be able to keep the promise he also made of no repercussions, and pointed out that I knew Ben Madison much, much better than he did. Marc Moisan had been a citizen for less than a year, I think, whereas I had been not only a citizen, but a former Ben-ally and Prime Minister for almost seven years. I told him that he ought to take my perspective into account when making his decisions about who to believe.

Q: *In other words, "don't try and hand me that bullshit." Was opinion unanimous among the Founding Parents in both cases?*

A: Pretty much, yes. I sent copies of Ronalt and Marc's email to our mailing list, as well as my responses, and got back only positive feedback.

Q: *I believe that the nation would be very interested in an annotated publication of this correspondence. Any chance you might do so someday?*

A: Certainly. If there is interest, I will publish these emails. Ronalt and Marc both operated under the assumption that our emails were open and public.

Q: *So other than shipping the National Archives back to him, you haven't had contact with Ben since?*

A: No direct contact whatsoever. The only kind of indirect contact came after the last Dean election when Ben wrote on the Kingdom message board that Maxime reported there was a rift between Gruber-supporters and Pope-supporters. To refute that false charge, Gruber and I published a joint statement on Wittenberg to affirm that both of us are committed to the Republic.

Q: *While we're on the subject of luring-back, the Republic lured me back, on its own merit without conscious effort, from my own distant corner of the Talossan (or never-quite-Talossan) Diaspora. While Gödafrieu Válcadác'h was my first contact, you went out of your way to welcome my prospective citizenship. When you first heard I was interested, what went through your mind?*

A: I was very excited that so many ex-Talossans and not-quite-Talossans were interested in coming to our shores. In your case, I recalled that you had been the subject of unfair attacks by Ben, so I was quite prepared to believe that you were a good guy, without any other evidence. (Laughs.)

Q: *Heh, all my sacrificed cows and goats did some good!*

A: (Laughs.) But seriously, I have generally discovered that if Ben disliked someone, that person must have a lot of redeeming features!

(Interviewer's note: at this point I see that I repeated a couple of earlier questions. This was either due to having to spread the interview over several sessions due to time constraints, or my own incompetence, however the reader elects to see it. In any event, the answers are not only factually consistent but entertaining and shed new light on both questions. I have chosen not to disrupt the actual flow by fixing my goof and merging the text, which would delay publication because I couldn't merge my interviewee's words without giving him a chance to approve or disapprove. Thus, let my disorganization enter the Official Record as proven fact.)

Q: *In the Kingdom's 'official histories' you've gone from Illustrious Leader to Fallen Angel. Do you have any reaction to the change in the way you're characterized?*

A: I think that the change in the official history ought to be telling to anyone in the Kingdom--the fact that history is rewritten by Ben is a chilling point. On the other hand, I have not been as

tarnished as Chris Gruber, Gödafiëu Válcadác'h or M-P. I have, as you said, been demoted from Illustrious Leader to Fallen Angel, but not all the way down to Prince of Darkness. In a way, I am annoyed. After all, my name was on the original statement of why we seceded, I was the first Dean of the Republic. What am I, chopped liver? What does a guy have to do to become a Public Enemy these days?

Q: *I was wondering that myself. (Laughs.) But it's a good question. Why do you suppose he's been relatively gentle with you while fitting out your compatriots with horns and forked tails?*

A: I wonder if he thinks that one day I will come back, admit my errors, and ask to be readmitted to the Kingdom. I certainly have gone out of my way to quell any thoughts he may have had in that regard. Obviously, when I had physical possession of the Archives, he was not going to antagonize me. But he's had them back for months now.

Q: *You've expressed plans to run for President; if you're elected, your every action will set a precedent. Tell us what sort of pattern a Pope Presidency would seek to establish for the office.*

A: I would seek to make the Presidency a position that is accountable to the laws of the land. I would use the position to support and defend the Republic, but to do so in a manner that is consistent with our Constitution and our laws.

I believe that in the past, I have governed by recruiting and organizing the best talents of the nationette into tackling the major issues. I don't think I have attempted to resolve all controversies and issues myself, but rather to arbitrate solutions between different factions, and to bring forward and highlight the best ideas that are floated. A Pope Presidency would attempt to operate in this manner.

Q: *This is the point where any Greek God Guy worth his salt consults the Oracle. While I cut up the goats and get the fire going, I'd like to know what you see in our future. Look two years ahead, if you would, and describe the Republic you feel we will grow into: size, style, institutions.*

A: I think we have a lot of growth in our future. I see us attracting more of the old Talossan Diaspora, but also newcomers to the hobby of micronationalism. I also see us on good terms with other micronations that are still operating. I think we will carry on a style of pragmatism--finding practical solutions to pressing problems. We will continue to embrace a healthy skepticism towards arbitrary authority, mindful of what we lived under in the Kingdom.

We will continue to have vibrant, boisterous politics, although I think the tone will be much, much friendlier than we experienced in the Kingdom. Interest in the language will continue, and may well draw new citizens. The language, however, will continue to be a point of contention between the Kingdom and the Republic, one that will require a thoughtful resolution.

Q: *Would it be fair to characterize you as not-very-guardedly optimistic?*

A: One year ago, the founding fathers of the Republic were an embattled group of dissidents in an increasingly tyrannical Kingdom. We were dispirited and many of us were ready to renounce our citizenships. We kept each other's spirits up through a secret email list.

Today, we look back at what we accomplished by seceding. We have the Republic, which is an incredibly vibrant and creative community. We don't have the kinds of fights and feuds we endured under Ben. It's kind of hard not to be optimistic, given what we've achieved. What we've all achieved, Founding Fathers, ex-Talossans and Not-Quite-Talossans alike.

Q: *Indeed. Do you foresee a resolution to the language issue, perhaps even have one to propose?*

A: That's tricky. I don't have a plan to propose at the moment. I am hopeful that we will find a resolution, but realistic about the fact that Ben Madison is very jealous about the language.

Q: *We're near the end, but I'd like to ask about the secret e-mail list you mentioned. When did that start, and how did it expand? At some point, someone has to take the plunge and say to someone else 'this sucks,' right?*

A: I think it started as an outgrowth of the PC mailing list--with the Grey Congress Party added to it. But I wasn't really involved in the creation of it, so I can't give a definitive answer.

Q: *How'd you get included?*

A: I was on the PC list, and as Opposition Leader, I was certainly involved in "The Resistance". I think I was on the progenitor of the mailing list. But, as you said, there was a point when people started talking about the idea of secession and of forming the Republic.

Q: *Do you think the Kingdom's spasms of discontent will prove a recurring pattern, spawning periodic flights of disillusioned Talossans followed by 'kinder, gentler' Ben days, ad infinitum? Or ad madisonium?*

A: I think it has been a consistent pattern in the Kingdom to have periodic waves of renunciations. In the past, these people would melt away, perhaps keeping in touch with one another. Now, they have an alternative--so I think it is important that the Republic maintain a visibility among the Kingdomites, so that the next wave of renunciators know that they have a place to go to.

Q: *You already know that you have the Republic's full attention, but you are surely aware that you have that of many in the Kingdom as well. Some are widely liked and respected in the Republic. What, if anything, would you like to say to those who remain behind?*

A: I'd like to let them know that the Republic has real ties of shared heritage and affection with the citizens of the Kingdom. And I would like them to know that when the going gets rocky again, as it will, and when they find themselves facing the wrath of Madison, as they may, that the Republic is here--where one can continue to be a Talossan without having to live under tyranny.

If I boiled it down to a slogan, perhaps it would be "The Republic of Talossa--We're Here For You."

Q: *Now, if you'd address yourself to those who have never been Talossans. Many may be wondering: if I join a Talossa, which should it be? Here's your opportunity to say a few words to them.*

A: I would encourage them to exercise their critical faculties in evaluating the claims made. Read our website and the statement we made about why we left--and try to get honest answers about these issues from both Republicans and Kingdomites. I think it would quickly become apparent which Talossa encourages these kinds of questions and which Talossa tries to stifle them.

Q: *Anything else you'd like to voice?*

A: I think that we have all undertaken a great ambition--to pursue our visions of nation-building in a free environment, unencumbered by a "National Guru" or a jealous, possessive creator. I am proud of what we have accomplished, and I have to say that the Republic has already succeeded beyond anything I anticipated when we launched it.

Q: *Couldn't agree more. Michael Pope, thank you for all your time, energy and candour.*

A: And thank you for the work you are putting into this important project.

1 A perineometer is kind of like a miniature dildo that measures the strength of the pelvic floor muscles and enables the user to build them up. If you ever happen to be hanging out near a woman's pelvic floor and she has an ultra-ripped pelvic floor six-pack, you know she's been hitting the perineometer and you should perhaps pay the appropriate tasteful compliment. In all other situations, the interviewee's advice is surely sage.

This author has no word on when the Bowflex people will begin marketing a perineometer attachment, but it can't be long before we see them in infomercials—something to think about when you're about to switch over to Nick@Nite to watch old "Roseanne" reruns.

2 That is, of course, except for a particular New Zealander! Ahem!

Art Verbotten, July 2007

"Art Verbotten" is the nom de guerre of the oldest experienced active Talossan citizen, who joined in 1985. He is currently Senior Justice of the High Court of the Talossan Republic. Interviewer: Miestrâ Schivâ

There seems to be no interest on the Kingdom's part to associate with the Republic. There's gotta be love and it can't be one sided if something like this were to happen. If anything I've seen more attempts to drive wedges between the two than anything, not that we'd need any more reasons to distrust one another.

Tell us about those mythical Milwaukee days in the late 70's / early 80's when you first met the young Ben Madison. What do you remember of the foundation of Talossa?

Mythical? I guess after all that has happened and has been documented they could be regarded as such, but they sure didn't feel that way at the time. We were just a bunch of 13 & 14 year old kids trying not to get trampled under foot in a Milwaukee Public HS with an enrollment of about 1100. I had spent my previous eight years at a private catholic grade school of about 100 kids, so my freshman year at this public institution was a bit of a culture shock.

I met Josh M. first. We had several classes together and became friends. We began sitting together in the lunch room and it was here that I met Dan. Josh already knew Dan from grade school (I think) and probably a few other classes. Soon after this I met Bob M. who had classes with and was on the debate and forensic teams with Dan. Dan knew Ben from grade school and he was also on the debate and forensics team. I didn't really get to know Ben until sophomore year when we had an early hour study hall together in the school library. JJ was also in that study hall. He was a year ahead of us and I already knew him from another mutual friend. Also in that study hall was Gary C. who was a year behind us, but whom I knew from stage crew. The other figure in all of this was Harry W. who went to Milwaukee Tech, but grew up on the eastside with Dan and Bob. Finally there were our teachers Jean W. and Florence Y. to round out the group of people that Ben initially inflicted Talossa upon that first year.

For me Talossa started in the library at school. A typical study hall there would involve JJ trying to do homework and either Ben or myself finding something more interesting to distract all of us with. The distractions were typically historical, religious, or political.

In fall of 1979, Jimmy Carter was in the White House, the U.S. economy was in the tank, disco was on the radio, the Iranian revolution had just taken place and the militants who started it had taken U.S. citizens hostage. There was also an ultra-conservative Republican named Ronald Reagan emerging as a viable candidate for President. Needless to say, our discussions were usually about politics. The head librarian was also involved with these discussions from time to time. When he wasn't involved he was usually yelling at us for being too loud or distracting.

I recall Ben approaching me in January of 1980, after the holiday break with a handwritten newspaper and a folder of papers which declared his bedroom as an independent state called Talossa. I don't actually recall my response. I'm sure it was something like "That's very nice Ben. Did you fall off the psychiatrists couch and hit your head again?" I assumed it was another idea he'd grow tired of after a few days or weeks, but every other day or so he'd have a new newspaper to show everyone. His regular collection of announcements, ideas, and his frequent dramatic shifts in religious and political beliefs were now being funneled into this new country of his and all of it was being documented in his newspapers. At this time he was also obsessed with languages so it was very natural for him to start creating a unique national language for Talossa. It all just sort of fit together.

Before Ben started encouraging his friends to become citizens of Talossa; he encouraged them to set up their own "World Singular Secessionist" states. Yours was the Kingdom of Thord. Tell us about it. How long before you got bored and gave it up?

Thord lasted from late January till about May or June of 1980. I don't remember if Ben encouraged me to do this, or I just decided to follow along, probably a bit of both, but I created it because it seemed like a fun idea at the time. I think JJ had created his within a day or two of mine so naturally we formed an alliance that ultimately led to the League of Singular Secessions (LOSS).

Thord was named after a created land one of my stoner friends dreamt up. The land of Thord had two rules.

- Listen to everything I say because it is gospel.
- Do as you please.

I thought this was a great doctrine to found a singular secession on. Short, simple, and all authority accounted for. It was only later that I discovered the whole Norse tale of Thord and Erik and all that family blood feud stuff.

I recall drafting a short constitution, drawing a few maps of the place, and then declaring allegiance to the other fake countries that I knew of. Not much there really. Sometime in fall of that year I remember Ben asking me if I still had my folder with all the Thord stuff in it. I turned it all over him then except for a ring binder that I eventually handed over many years later. It had the Thordian crest on it and some other LOSS stuff as well.

You became a Talossan citizen in 1985, at about the right time to be involved in the first proper multi-party election. The Big Thick History tells us that Ben got you to run under the

Communist Party banner. Tell us about that.

Good question. Not really sure I was even aware of that although I've been told that before by Ben. The key here might be the phrase "Ben got me to run..."

Understand that the mid 80's were my college years. I was working as much as I could to pay for my schooling. When I wasn't in school or at work I was probably celebrating with adult beverages and anything else that was available, but mostly adult beverages. During the time frame in question, given the right moment and blood alcohol, had Ben asked me to run on a Communist ticket I would have agreed to it. Speaking from a personal stand point I never really got a good handle on communism in the first place so I never saw it as all that viable. The Russian and Chinese versions of the ideology, which were the two that were thrown in my face most often by cold war propaganda, seemed horribly corrupt and flawed. It might have been my conservative upbringing, but I never saw how they could work. Even after I looked through the haze of propaganda I still didn't see any viability. Anyway there is also the chance that Ben got it wrong. For the longest time one of the official charts had me listed as a PM for a short period of time. I actively avoided the PM spot my entire career. It wasn't until I pointed this out to Ben that it got changed.

You seem to have an interesting history of quitting Talossa at pivotal moments. You quit Talossa after the Peculiarist election victory in 1990, heralding an era of near-collapse. You quit Talossa - I think - for a brief period in 1997, just before we Penguineans walked out. And - most famously - you quit Talossa on Black Tuesday, April 13th, 2004. Ben called you "the conscience of Talossa". Is that a fair assessment, and what do you make of this interesting historical pattern?

Desperate times called for desperate measures. Yes, I have ducked out when things were heading from horrible to downright pathetic but with good reason.

Both times I left it was because I hated it all, including myself, and didn't want any part of it any more. I also saw no hope of liking it again in the near future with the available personnel.

For the record I did not bail in 1997. I stepped down from the court and out of political life, but I was talked out of leaving by Geoff T. In both my 1990 and 2004 resignations, I left primarily because of the behavior of our King and the retaliatory behavior he was inciting in his enemies over an extended period of time. Everyone hated everyone and all you did was walk around on eggshells every time you spoke up. It was not pleasant to be part of the country at either of those times.

I love Talossa but, I have always tried to view it as a hobby, a form of entertainment, a recreational activity I could jump into and out of when necessary. I am involved in this voluntarily. If I feel that it is taking over my day to day existence and affecting it in a negative manner without resolve, I will do what is best for me. Sometimes this is not what is best for Talossa, but given the choice of me or Talossa, me always wins.

All three times I asked myself, "Does this activity (being a Talossan) have any redeeming qualities that would prevent me from walking away from it right now? Is there anything I can do to change what is happening here that won't degenerate my current mental health any further than it is? Will walking away from it all send the message to the rest of Talossa that they have killed the good spirit of the country?"

Twice the answers were NO, NO, and YES. In 1997 I couldn't say NO to the second question so I stayed on...after some coaxing.

Many of we latter day Talossans think that there is a definite schism in Talossan history in 96-97, the year that Talossa went properly online and cybercits started taking an increasingly important political and cultural role. To put it bluntly, some of us think it was at that point when Ben finally "lost it". The authoritarian and ruthless streak in his personality is pretty obvious throughout the history, but it seems that once the majority of active Talossans were words on a computer screen rather than people who lived around the corner, he decided he no longer needed to hold back and became the intolerant, bullying, "Mad King Ben". Speaking as someone who knew him all his adult life, how fair is this assessment?

IMHO the initial schism started as a technological one; Cybercits vs. Old Growthers. I think much of this was sparked on by the "we're not going to change cronyism of the PC leadership, namely Wes and JJ. Ben was already active online at this point but JJ and Wes never saw themselves involved in a computerized version of Talossa. Wes never was involved with one at all. They didn't even see themselves using computers for anything other than word processing back then and I think this made Ben uncertain about doing this. I will admit that in 1995 it seemed to me sort of far fetched that we'd be online and global until the Clockwork Orange party sold me on the idea at one of our gatherings.

I used to ask Ben every year or so starting about 1988 "Where do we want Talossa to go next." He always had an answer or a suggestion right up until about 1997. I asked him then and he admitted that Talossa was now bigger than he had ever imagined it becoming and that he had no answer for that question. That I couldn't get him to work on one should have set off red flags but it didn't.

Ben's attitude towards us in person didn't seem to change all that much although he did initially speak of differences between cybercitizens and old growthers. The cybercits thing faded away as we all adapted to the technology. I noticed that his online attitude seemed to deteriorate with each online war he got himself into. I first noticed this change around 1996 when he started to spar with some of the early micronationalists on the discussion boards. That's when the bug-nation thing hit. It got worse during the Penguinean affair and still worse with his divorce. After the Liberals bailed and he married Amy is when it just spiraled away out of control.

Let's get polemical for a moment. All the other long-term Talossans - s:reux Metáirâ, Lorentz, etc - are citizens of the Kingdom. Why are you a citizen of the Republic? What are the chances

- as you see it - for Talossan unity?

I quit the Kingdom in April 04 for the reasons I listed in my previous answer. I could not see doing business with Ben as a possibility ever again. After the mass exodus of June 1, 2004 I received a thoughtful e-mail from the founders of the Republic asking me if I would be interested in joining and building a new and better Talossa. This one would be monarch free, truly democratic, emphasize rather than stifle creativity, and welcome the sincere micronationalists on the Internet rather than turn their nose up at them like self righteous snobs. So far the Republic has lived up to these promises and I plan to help it continue doing so.

IMHO the chances for a reunion are looking pretty slim with the current conditions. There seems to be no interest on the Kingdom's part to associate with the Republic. There's gotta be love and it can't be one sided if something like this were to happen. If anything I've seen more attempts to drive wedges between the two than anything, not that we'd need any more reasons to distrust one another.

Did you have any idea that Chris Gruber and his allies were planning to secede? Was it a big surprise to you?

No and Sort of.

There were a lot of e-mails flying around that entire spring.

I'd come home from work and there'd be 50 Talossan e-mails waiting for me each day where normally I'd get 2 or 3 a week, two of which would be JJ complaining about his computer needing fixing. I sensed something was brewing but I wasn't in on the plot at all. Martin sort of hinted at it, but never said anything directly to me. Had I been informed I would not have quit when I did.

After I did quit in April, I still kept getting all the e-mail.

I just wanted it to go away.

I recall asking to be taken off the mailing list because I did not care to know about something I was no longer part of. There was a small protest from Chris, but they complied anyway.

When I received the e-mail on June 2 announcing the secession, I immediately went to the site and was amazed at what they had done. I also noticed that more than a few lines of that letter of explanation from Michael Pope were taken from an essay that I had written a few months before explaining my position to him. I was quite flattered by this.

So the "Sort of" I mentioned means that I realized the folks involved with the coop owned and controlled all of the Kingdom's websites even though I warned Ben repeatedly that this was a bad thing. I didn't expect them to yank them out from under the Kingdom's nose the way they did but as I said before "Desperate times call for desperate measures."

As a High Court Justice you are not able to run for elective office in the Republic. Have you ever felt a desire to? Have you ever felt any interest in getting involved in party politics or the Chamber of Deputies?

If I really felt that strongly about it I would, but for the time being I think I have a more natural calling as a Justice.

I spent several years of my life learning how to analyze scripts, screen plays, play texts, and literary works in order to pick them apart by their elements. Tearing apart legislation requires the same skill set. I actually enjoy doing that more than constructing legislation. The construction process was always a tedious thing for me which is why I rarely drafted legislation. I inspired numerous laws that other folks took credit for writing. Had I been asked to write them I would have gotten bored and frustrated and never finished.

As for party politics, they take up an awful lot of time and time is something I don't have as much of any more. I've been debating getting more active with this but it'd have to be a really comfortable fit before I did.

As the founder of Florenciâ province, would you say that provincial politics, in either Kingdom or Republic, have a future?

Not until they become communities within themselves.

This question has been asked repeatedly and the nemesis to provincial politics in Talossa has always been national party politics. At the national level we understand it, but at the provincial level it is irrelevant.

First the people of the provinces need to know who their fellow provincial neighbors are. I'm in Florencia, but I'll be damned if I know who else is. I haven't had to know any of them for provincial purposes. In order to bring focus to the provinces they need to have a sense of community within. They need to be acquainted and need activities that reinforce this.

We're an Internet society so doing dinner won't work here. Just off the top of my head things like

fantasy football leagues, chess tournaments, Video game competitions, talent contests posted on You-Tube, maybe a world cup fantasy tournament, might help get folks interacting besides reading what was written on other discussion boards.

Until the provinces start behaving like communities there will be no politics in them.

If you woke up in the morning and found that the Republic had voted you dictatorial powers for 24 hours, what would you do with them? Feel free to be creative.

-Make the dictatorial powers permanent.

-Resize Talossa to its traditional size east of the river.

-Reclaim Vuode and Mussolini Provinces making the country continuous once again.

-Annex Mussolini province to Florencia Province

-Change Vuode province's name to whatever Bill Cooper's Talossan last name is.

-Order the webmasters to go through the web portal and archive all the finished boards and eliminate all the dead ones at pain of death.

-Get all the links for all the Republics blogs, homepages, and newspapers to one site.

That's all I can think of for now.